



pivotal
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Narrative Change and Impact Project:

Youth Mental Health & Well-Being Content & Conversations

Credits & Acknowledgments

Monica Clark, PhD

Lead Author and Project Director

Lissa Soep, PhD

Editor and Senior Scholar

L'Oreal Thompson Payton

Contributing Writer

Pedro Vega Jr.

Creative Director

Eli Arbreton

Creative Services Project Coordinator

Kyra Kyles

CEO, YR Media

Angela Serna

Director of Communications, YR Media

ZM Communications

Special thanks to Pivotal Ventures
for their generous support of this project.

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Introduction



1.1 BACKGROUND

YR MEDIA HAS OVER 25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE working with a diverse population of youth from historically and systematically underserved and underrepresented communities. The organization was formed as Youth Radio in 1992 in a Berkeley storefront by Ellin O'Leary and a team of teens. Originally envisioned as a one-time summer program teaching youth journalism skills, it transformed into a year-round after school program as a result of overwhelming demand from the young content creators. In 2007 the organization purchased a former bank building in downtown Oakland and built it out into a state-of-the-art media education and content production headquarters. In 2018, again based on youth feedback, Youth Radio rebranded to YR Media and transitioned from a local program, producing content nationally via partners including NPR, Teen Vogue, and the New York Times, into a national media enterprise with contributors from diverse communities around the country, and an owner operated platform at YR.MEDIA, where youth publish content that engages an audience of their peers.

YR Media delivers intensive media arts education, paid employment, and wraparound support services to 250 young people annually at our headquarters, and hundreds more through our national network of youth contributors. Our programs are healing-centered, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and involve both peer training and adult mentorship. Systemic barriers have excluded BIPOC younger generations and other young creators from historically resilient communities for far too long. YR Media is here to change that.

In Oakland, our programs consist of an intensive six-month Media Education course, and paid internships available to graduates of this training. Young people have the unique opportunity to work alongside professional adult mentors running a national media enterprise, publishing content that can reach audiences in the tens of millions. All youth in our Oakland programs receive access to holistic support services, including case management, mental health support, professional development, and healthy food.

In 2020-2021, YR Media published **888** stories on yr.media from more than **150** correspondents across the country and hundreds more pitching via our online portals or joining our virtual community. This number does not include participants in our Oakland program. As of May 2021, **318** teens and young adults are active in our online community, where they access opportunities to participate in the coverage and connect with other young media makers and editors. All these contributors have access to our DIY toolkits, which package our high-quality media education curriculum for remote creators.



1.2 PROJECT OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES

YR MEDIA'S NARRATIVE CHANGE AND IMPACT PROJECT addressed the need for safe spaces online where young people can use media creation to engage in supportive conversations about mental health and well-being, and to share their own and their communities' stories with an audience of their peers. In this report, we document and reflect on what we have learned from the content, audience and social media strategies used in our Beyond Self-Care campaign over a one-year period. Our hope is to deepen our own engagement with youth and to share our model for others to implement, adapt and expand. The project builds understanding among youth-serving organizations and adolescent mental health stakeholders about how to facilitate youth-led media creation and conversations in an authentic way. This report provides a framework of best practices and design principles for assessing impact, improving programming, and informing the interconnected fields of equity-driven media and adolescent well-being.

Young people need avenues for self-expression where they own and shape their stories, rather than having adults look in from the outside and tell them who they are. YR Media has found that personal narrative storytelling can have a major positive impact on young people's lives, and can help them develop a sense of self, agency, and confidence. As reported in the pages that follow, we base this finding on evidence drawn from a range of sources, including: an external audit, interviews and focus groups with youth creators and audiences, analysis of young people's media-making processes and products, and reflections from experts working at the intersection of media and mental health.

The Narrative Change and Impact Project provided a platform for young people to explore important topics with their peers. Their content featured the voices of mental health providers, advocates, policymakers, families, and care-givers. The stories produced were on young people's terms and through their lenses, but the dialogues — and the changes we seek — cross generations.

Furthermore, the Narrative Change and Impact Project gathered qualitative data on the effect of digital journalism and storytelling on both the creators and consumers of these stories. With support from Pivotal Ventures, a Melinda French Gates company, YR Media is able to share actionable insights with the field about how to support youth as their content spreads among peers and the broader public. In the following sections, the key learnings will be presented. We start with an overview of the content produced and a series of case studies. Then we share performance metrics and methods for optimizing engagement via social media. We close with best practices and recommendations to the field.

Outcomes: Key Findings & Learning

2.1 CONTENT

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has brought about both challenges and successes in the field of youth mental health. Even prior to the global health crisis, schools, colleges and community agencies [struggled](#) to provide key, culturally responsive supports to young people living with mental health issues. We're only beginning to understand [how to design](#) digital and social media environments to promote youth well-being. With increased stressors and sudden change, [three quarters of young people](#) have reported poor mental health related to the pandemic.

Yet along with these causes for concern, remote mental health resources are on the rise. Young people are accessing virtual therapy. Communities have formed around podcasts and social media pages dedicated to mental health that can help to guide teens through this difficult time. Through strong, vulnerable, and poignant stories from well-known figures in the arts, entertainment and sports, as well as everyday peers who fill their social feeds, young people are witnessing and leading a broader shift in society's attitude toward mental health. We are seeing unprecedented openness and calls for accountability that demand equity-driven institutions and systems, and changes to the way we live to enable greater well-being.

When creating mental health content for youth, young people should be the driving voices behind it. Too often, mental health coverage centers on hopelessness. Young people want to see stories of people like them, successfully dealing with their difficulties. In order to achieve wider visibility with mental health content, YR Media has developed a model to spark fresh, honest conversations that build resilience.

YR Media's approach to mental health and well-being coverage during the pandemic and beyond builds on our prior strategy in this area. Leveraging the first wave of Pivotal Ventures support, "Me, Myself and My Mental Health" was an editorial initiative and campaign that moved "beyond self-care" to change the conversation about mental health as a shared experience and human right. The content strategy was multifaceted, offering a unique and powerful mix of reporting, personal essays, Q+As, resources, playlists and illustrations across social channels from YR Media's young creators to build connections, shed old stigmas and improve the systems they depend on for help.

In the expansion of that campaign, reported on here, YR Media's strategy for mental health and well-being coverage included:

- 1-2 times-per-week first-person and reported stories from teen and young-adult contributors across the country published on YR.MEDIA, our social feeds and partner sites
- arts content including popular challenges for young artists to create original music and playlists pegged to the theme of well-being, in partnership with professional producers
- teacher resources that enable educators to support their students' social and emotional well-being during the pandemic and beyond
- three episodes of our Adult ISH podcast centered on mental health and well-being
- YR Media's award-winning documentary Unadopted, where youth employee Noel Anaya threads his own foster care story into a wider examination of the social welfare system's silent but pervasive bias against teenagers and the toll it takes, including on young people's mental health
- YR Media's first free virtual [#BeyondSelfCare three-day summit](#)

2.1 CONTENT

The content campaign included:

- the establishment of a network of contributors from around the country reporting on mental health and well-being and workflow to curate and prepare that content for publication on YR.MEDIA, social channels and partner outlets
- dedicated hubs on YR.Media highlighting the content mix and conversations produced by YR Media's young creators
- a mix of influencers and partnerships to highlight the conversation YR Media is having about mental health as a shared experience and human right

An external audit of YR Media's campaign found ample evidence of our mission on clear display across the mental health and well-being content produced. Published content mirrored young people's experience of our programs, where 100% of participants report feeling respected and supported by adult collaborators, and 99% say they've been able to create something meaningful for themselves and/or their communities . The content was found to reflect these same values, while highlighting communities with the most at stake in improving well-being outcomes and that face the biggest structural obstacles to realizing that potential. This is key, as was noted in stakeholder focus groups where participants stressed that high quality content must "be directed toward young people and also created by or with young people; include a diverse range of opinions of voices, especially from marginalized groups; and direct readers to trustworthy resources." The audit determined that YR Media's approach to mental health and well-being coverage "respects and honors young people of color from all backgrounds via diverse content in regards to perspective, topic, and experience. It is relevant and reflects our times."

Audience focus groups have further revealed that young people's stories can have a profound impact. Viewers of our Unadopted documentary named mental health services as the support that young adults in the foster care system needed most. Based on Noel Anaya's reporting and powerful first-person narrative, viewers came to recognize the importance of services to address childhood trauma and ongoing well-being check-ins for system-engaged youth. Focus group participants attributed these insights to the story they had just seen.

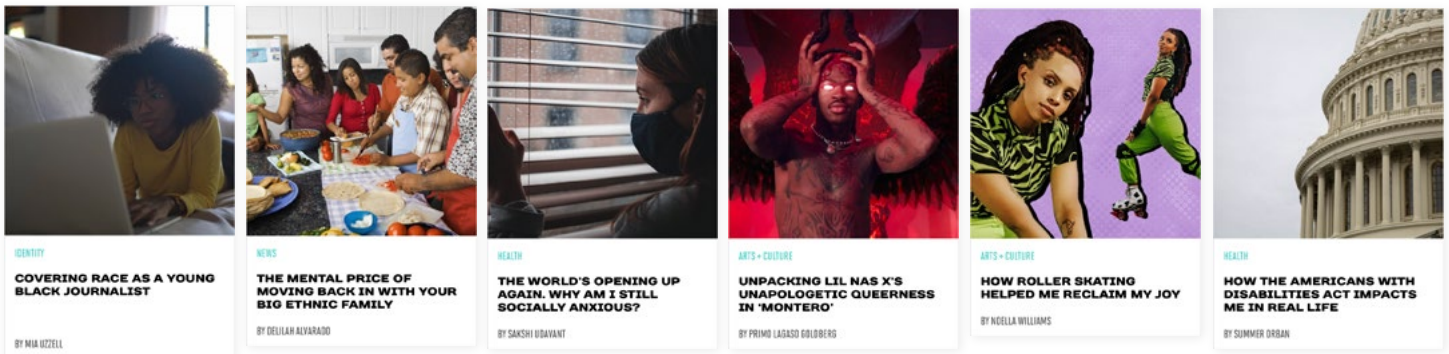
Finally, the content itself is full of insights young people share about their own strategies for sustaining themselves and their peers while creating content on challenging topics. In her story about covering race in 2020, Mia Uzzell wrote about her commitment to creating "a safe space to unshoulder and confront the burdens we carried" as Black journalists in her student newsroom. Given the toll that micro-aggressions take on well-being, Caleb Sewell called for ongoing cultural competence training for emerging content creators; it can't be "a once-a-year thing or once-every-six-months thing ... training should be continuous." And our storytellers also highlight the importance of taking time out for joy, as Noella Williams reflected in her ode to roller skating, which she never thought "would go from a weekly activity to becoming therapy, but I'm glad that it has." These and other voices from YR Media's Beyond Self Care coverage contain wisdom that points a way forward for the authors themselves, their peers and fellow creators.

2.1.1 MULTIMODAL STORYTELLING

IN DEVELOPING mental health and well-being content and conversations for the Narrative Change and Impact Project, a multimodal approach to storytelling was taken, utilizing dynamic formats that were accessible and resonant with youth. The line-up included written posts, visual content (including listicles, photojournalism, videos and interactives), and audio content (including podcast episodes, “remix challenges” focused on self-care, and music playlists centering mental health and well-being). The content covered a wide variety of topic areas and issues, with voices from across the country. A snapshot of the variety of story headlines includes:

[Covering Race as a Young Black Journalist](#) | [The Mental Price of Moving Back in with Your Big Ethnic Family](#) | [The World’s Opening up Again. Why Am I Still Socially Anxious?](#) | [Unpacking Lil Nas X’s Unapologetic Queerness in ‘Montero’](#) | [How Rollerskating Helped Me Reclaim My Joy](#) | [How the Americans with Disabilities Act Impacts Me in Real Life](#) | [Meghan Markle, Microaggressions & Mental Health](#) | [How Biden’s stutter fueled my own political ambitions](#)

The Senior Editor of Mental Health and Well-Being developed a story tracker database to ensure that contributors’ backgrounds, identities and geographic locations reflected the diversity of our audience and under-represented lived experiences. The database allowed the editorial team to track the topics and themes, to strategically plan for a powerful pipeline for intersectional storytelling.



Mental health and well-being content was also produced across programs and departments at YR Media, including the newsroom, the Adult ISH podcast, the Arts Team’s “Remix Your Life” program, and Teach YR’s teacher curriculum toolkits. The overarching goal was to infuse this coverage across YR Media’s beats, as we know these themes touch all aspects of our lives. YR Media’s Senior Editor for Mental Health and Well-Being discussed the need to avoid siloing and work towards integration in her stakeholder interview:



“And I remember distinctly when I was reading the survey results from YR readers and contributors from the past, there was one in particular that asked, “what is a world where a mental health and wellness column doesn’t exist,” like where this vertical or this desk is no longer needed because those types of stories are integrated into every facet of pop culture and media? And we have seen that this year! I think in particular with the examples I just mentioned [YR Media’s coverage on Lil Nas X and Meghan Markle] and even more recently in the sports world, particularly with Naomi Osaka and her standing up for her own mental health and well-being. And so the lines are becoming blurred. That’s not just a news story. It’s not a sports story. It’s not a mental health story. It has a little bit of all of the above. And that is the goal, because it does touch everything, so it should be integrated into all of the conversations that we have.” (*L’Oreal, stakeholder interview, 6.22.21*)

2.1.2 CASE STUDY 1: PODCAST

Mental health and well-being content was integrated throughout YR Media's Adult ISH podcast's entire fifth season and was the explicit focus of three out of ten total episodes: "[Detoxifying from social media and spotify's speech emotion recognition AI](#)", "[Taking care with songwriter Tayla Parx and yoga teacher Jessamyn Stanley](#)", "[Our experiences with mental health medication](#)". Nyge, podcast host and youth contributor, discussed the team's strategy of weaving mental health stories throughout the fifth season:

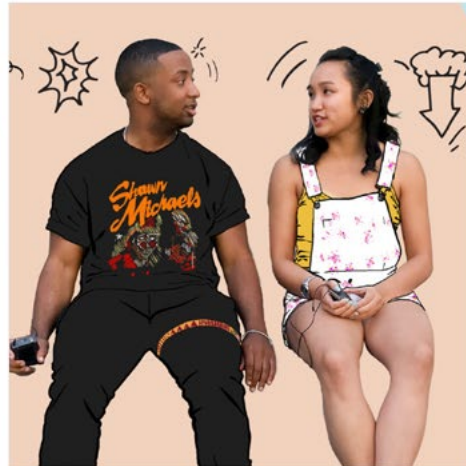


"We knew that this season, at least three episodes would fall during Mental Health Awareness Month - so going into that, we were like, let's take full advantage of that and do a combo like three episodes, all based around different aspects of mental health ... And we were like, how can we do more, give more tangible resources to people? And so we posted resources through our website. We connected people to actual therapists and affordable therapy. And then even beyond that, we worked with like four therapists on our show before, in a segment that we did called "Therapy Tinder," where we were just like matchmaking with therapists. We were just saying things that we were dealing with and then they were all, each of the therapists were saying, like, how they would approach it." (Nyge, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21)



PODCASTS, TECH

DETOXING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA & SPOTIFY'S SPEECH EMOTION RECOGNITION AI



PODCASTS

OUR EXPERIENCES WITH MENTAL HEALTH MEDICATION



PODCASTS

TAKING CARE WITH SONGWRITER TAYLA PARX AND YOGA TEACHER JESSAMYN STANLEY

The podcast team felt strongly that telling stories about mental health struggles can help young people feel less alone and hold institutions accountable, but listeners also need practical tools, tips and resources so they know where they can turn if they are having a hard time or want to do more to help others. One of the podcast episodes involved an interview with BIPOC Yoga instructor and Instagram wellness influencer, Jessamyn Stanley, who focuses on decentering whiteness in the yoga and wellness industry, providing yoga access and free resources to BIPOC communities and encouraging mental health and well-being for all people regardless of skin color or body type. In planning this episode, the podcast team wanted to make sure to include a free, actionable resource at the beginning of the episode that listeners and community members could come back to and access after the show aired. Working with Jessamyn Stanley, the team decided that they would start the segment with Stanley leading a guided meditation to help ground listeners and set the tone for the episode. In order

2.1.2 CASE STUDY 1: PODCAST

to ensure ease of accessibility to this free resource, the team posted the guided meditation as a stand-alone [audio clip](#) on YR Media's website:



“We did a guided meditation on our interview with Jessamyn. And it was super fun to do that ... And so we packaged it separately and then released it internally, first to staff at YR so that everybody could just get that guided meditation by itself, aside from the episode. And then we released it with the episode so that people could just get that guided meditation for free and some time stamps if you just want to listen to the meditation also and don't want to listen to us talk.”

(Nyge, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21)

In addition to providing live mental health and well-being resources in the actual flow of the show, the podcast team included a list of resources with live links under each episode published on the YR Media website. To spread best practices across the podcasting ecosystem, YR Media's hosts and producer also presented a dynamic workshop to Radiotopia, the podcast network that distributes Adult ISH and other leading national shows, where they facilitated a candid conversation about covering mental health, appealing to young listeners, and sharing highly personal stories with a wide audience.

In the first of three special Mental Health Awareness Month episodes, [Adult ISH](#) co-hosts [Merk Nguyen](#) and [Nyge Turner](#) learn practical skills for taking care of their whole selves – mind, body and soul. First, they connect to their breath and relax their minds with yoga instructor and body positivity advocate [Jessamyn Stanley](#), who leads them through mindful conversation and a sonic meditation. Then star songwriter [Tayla Parx](#) shares her best tips to cultivate a soul-nourishing creative practice while dodging burnout, plus some disco-influenced tracks from her latest album, “Coping Mechanisms.” Follow our socials [@yrAdultISH](#) to stay connected!

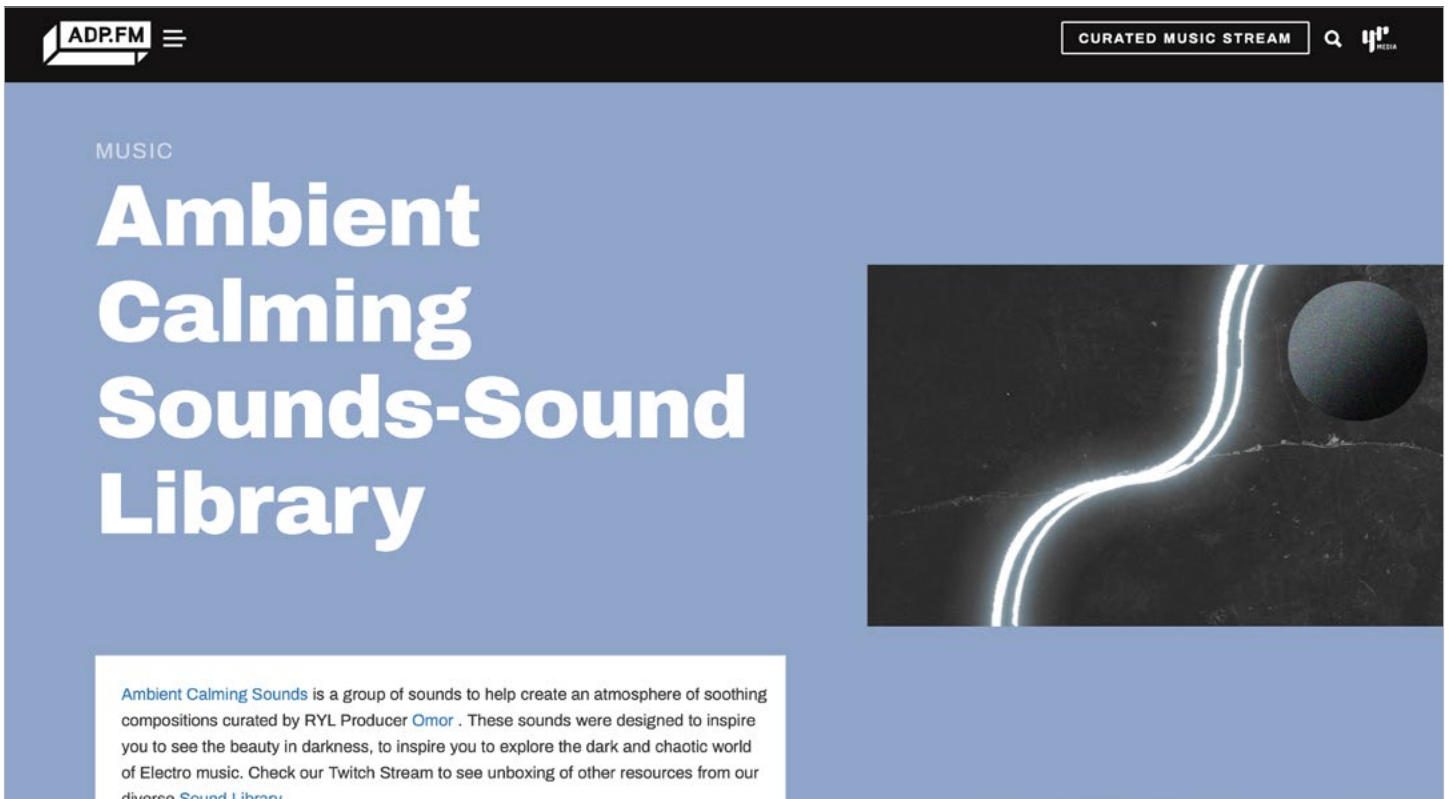
And if you're looking for some mental health resources, here are some to check out:

- [Latinx Therapy](#)
- [Therapists of Color](#)
- [Asian Mental Health Collective](#)
- [Therapy for Black Men](#)
- [Therapy for Black Girls](#)
- [National Queer & Trans Therapist Network](#)
- Even MORE resources on [this Google Doc!](#)

2.1.3 CASE STUDY 2: ARTS TEAM

THE ARTS DEPARTMENT integrated Beyond Self-Care into their content and production strategy in a number of ways this year as well, including:

- All Day Play FM ([ADP.FM](#)) creating playlists themed around mental health and well-being: [gettin' by](#) | [Steady](#) | [Get It Together](#) | [Self Love Selections](#)
- integrating mental health and well-being practices into their Out of School Time (OST) programming with youth
- centering one of their virtual learning Type Beat Remix Challenges on music production for mental health and wellness



When COVID hit, the leaders of YR Media's music department felt a sense of urgency to reconfigure programming to combat the isolation young people were experiencing as a result of the pandemic. They were committed to continuing, and potentially even expanding, YR Media's role supporting and sustaining young people's creative expression with these challenging conditions and the pivot to remote learning. They were witnessing first-hand the toll the pandemic could take on young people who depend on peers for well-being in school and beyond. In addition to being cut off from friends, many young musicians and artists were abruptly unable to access the creative spaces and supports they rely on for developing their craft and building community.

So the arts team created a dynamic new program called Type Beat Challenge, a virtual studio experience that highlights new genres and creates connections between the best up-and-coming music producers nationwide. Every two weeks a new "Type Beat Challenge" is launched, where a young producer drops an original sound pack and inspirational playlist, followed by a live beat-making production demo using the pack, an Instagram Live Q+A, invitation for participants to produce their own beats with the sound pack provided, and a showcase of their original creations.

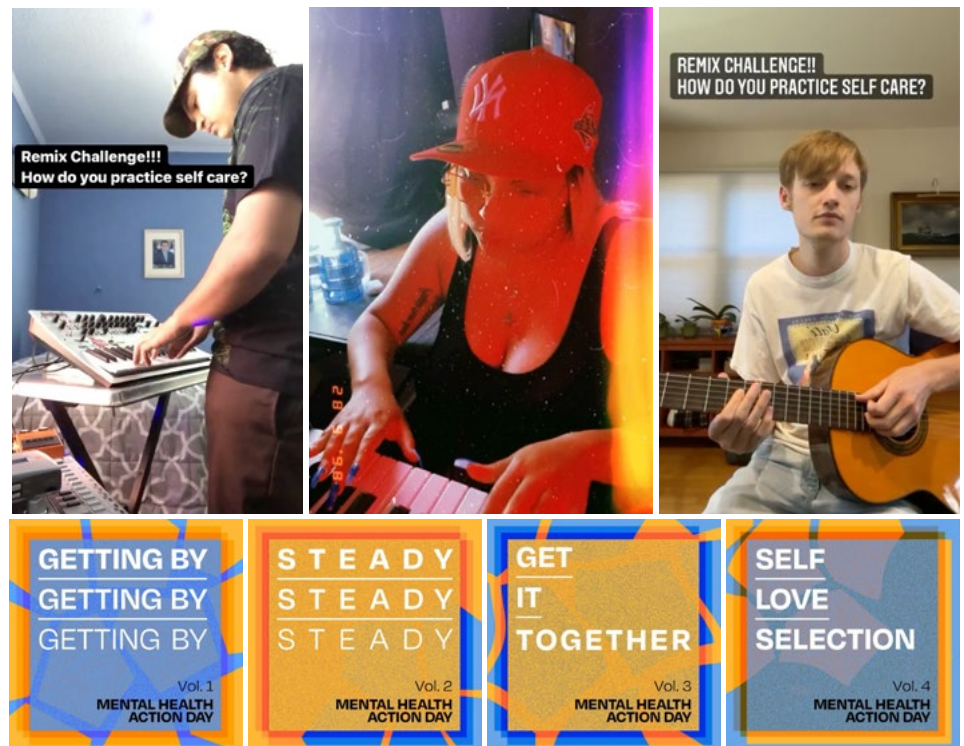
2.1.3 CASE STUDY 2: ARTS TEAM

The arts team knew they needed to build mental health and well-being practices into the Type Beat Challenge, which they did in two ways. First, they integrated [healing-centered practices](#) and tuned into participants' well-being by:

1. Starting each meeting with check ins
2. Setting aside space for young people to just talk about whatever issues are on their minds
3. Employing creative methods to read young people's emotions, especially when online, e.g. use of emojis in chat forums, response to activities, etc.

Second, the arts team dedicated one of their Type Beat Challenge themes to mental health, featuring a "calming lofi" tutorial and then inviting participants to produce their own spin on music that promotes feelings of well-being.

Based on YR Media's own approach and surveys of other arts education groups serving youth, we found that when integrating mental health and well-being into arts programming, it is key to experiment with various approaches, model vulnerability and create space for students to reflect and share.



May 18 – 20

YR Media Presents

Beyond Self-Care

Mental Health, Media & More

2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT

A HIGHLIGHT OF YR Media's Narrative Change and Impact Project was a free virtual summit we hosted during Mental Health Awareness Month (May 2021). The goal of the summit was to equip current and prospective YR Media contributors (teen and young adult writers, producers and artists) with the tools they need to thoughtfully and responsibly cover mental health and well-being while caring for their own. The Beyond Self-Care Summit positioned YR Media as a thought leader at the intersection of journalism and youth mental health, with a special focus on Gen Z. We aimed to go beyond "just talking" about the importance of mental health by enabling young content creators to tell their own stories, reaching significant audiences, while finding the sources of support and resilience they need to sustain this crucial work.

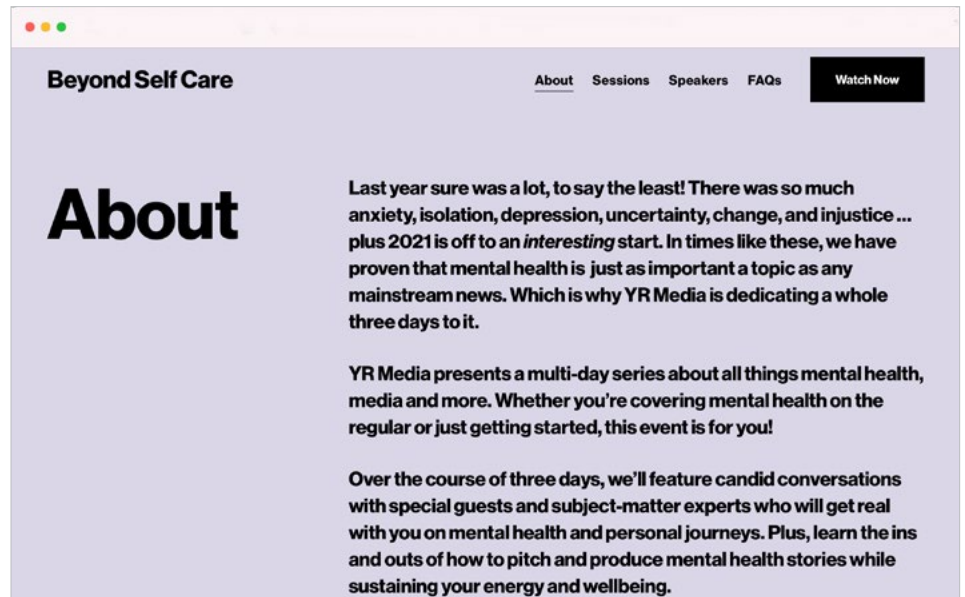
Reflections from Event Organizer... and Senior Editor for Mental Health and Well-Being, L'Oreal Thompson Payton:



"The Beyond Self-Care Summit that we had, sure it's a virtual event, but **it's also a form of storytelling** because at the end of the day, we're all humans. And that's the way I feel we learn best and connect with one another, through that storytelling process. So even though there were panels and they were moderated and had questions, **the conversation was still authentic**. And so in the same way that there are multiple ways of being when it comes to mental health wellness stories, I think the same is true of the different formats and platforms."

(L'Oreal, stakeholder interview, 6.22.21)

2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT



The target audience fell into three tiers: 1) current YR Media contributors with experience and/or interest in covering mental health and well-being while caring for their own; 2) prospective YR Media contributors, student journalists and entry-level journalists/content creators; and 3) YR Media audience (readers & listeners), social media followers and young people with an interest in mental health and well-being. Forty-six content creators participated in the three days of programming.

The campaign to promote the event included:

- distributing media alerts, conducting outreach, and distributing a wire release reaching 30,431,137
- developing organic posts and a paid social strategy that resulted in 49,055 reached, 79,202 impressions and 526 link clicks
- distributing an email/newsletter to approximately 800 media education students and national contributors, which resulted in a 31% open rate (industry standard is 20%) and a 9% click-through rate (Industry standard is 4%).



2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT

What is the Code of Conduct for this event?

YR Media's "Beyond Self Care" Summit virtual conference is dedicated to providing a fun, engaging, and safe event for everyone. All attendees, speakers, and YR staff are required to comply with the code of conduct. By attending the Summit, you are agreeing to abide by this code of conduct. Anyone found to be violating this code of conduct may be expelled at the discretion of organizers. YR Media has a zero-tolerance policy and will not tolerate any harassing or abusive behavior towards any participant. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Deliberate intimidation, stalking, or harassment
- Pornographic material or explicit content (sexual or violent in nature)
- Disruptive behavior, especially during talks, presentations, events, or activities
- Hateful or highly offensive content, including personal insults or content that attacks or dehumanizes a person based on gender, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, race, religion, or political affiliation
- Profanity
- Spam
- Misleading, fraudulent, or deceptive content
- Illegal content or activities

If in doubt, please keep it positive and professional and be mindful of the information that you choose to share with other participants. Please report any abusive content or behavior to Summit Support. We ask all participants to help create a safe and supportive environment of inclusiveness, and we look forward to your attendance.

Event Environment:

Summit sessions took place Tuesday, May 18th to Thursday, May 20th, from 6-8pm EST. These dates and times were selected strategically with the aim of capturing a wide audience across the US time zones. Each session opened up with calming, lo-fi music playing in the background and the welcoming face of a youth moderator to greet all as they arrived. The sessions were youth-led, open conversations centered on issues and topics of concern to youth. In order to ensure the summit was a safe and brave space for young people to come together and have conversations about mental health and well-being, the event website included a "code of conduct" page, which was also referenced at the opening of each session.

2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT

Session Titles with Speaker Bios & Descriptions:

Session #1

The screenshot shows a registration page for a session on Tuesday, May 18, from 6pm ET/3pm PT. The session length is 1 hour, moderated by L'Oreal Thompson Payton. The panelists are Merk Nguyen and Nyge Turner. A 'Register Now' button is visible. The main title of the session is 'Adulthood is Hard - Fireside Chat with Merk Nguyen and Nyge Turner of Award Winning Adult ISH Podcast'. A description below the title reads: 'Join us for a roundtable discussion with YR Media's very own co-hosts of our award-winning podcast Adult ISH, Merk Nguyen and Nyge Turner. We'll be talking about their personal mental health journeys, the benefits of therapy and of course, adulthood! Plus, they'll answer your burning questions about navigating early adulthood. Nothing's off the table!'

Panelists:

Merk Nguyen, co-host of Adult ISH (angela@yrmedia.org)

Merk Nguyen is a self-described “cis sis with a knack for puns and alliterations.” She co-hosts and produces Adult ISH, a culture/advice/storytelling podcast by YR Media & Radiotopia. If she’s not on the show advocating for mental health help (or mentioning her cartoon VO dreams), Merk voices LV in Ooh! You’re In Trouble — a podcast for tweens by Mortified Media & TRAX.

Based in LA but born and raised in the PNW, Merk’s the proud daughter of Vietnamese immigrants. She’s also a left-handed lover of cats!

Nyge Turner, co-host of Adult ISH (nygel@yrmedia.org)

Nygel Turner, 25, is an Oakland, California-based creator of Not Your Father’s Podcast and YouTube series Not Your Mama’s Kitchen. Nyge is the only person in Oakland who has never lost an argument. He will never own the red Jeep of his fantasies.

Moderator:

L’Oreal Thompson Payton, senior mental health editor at YR Media (loreal@yrmedia.org)

L’Oreal Thompson Payton is the senior mental health editor at YR Media, a national network of young journalists and artists. She’s also a freelance writer whose work has been featured in publications such as Bitch, Bustle, HelloGiggles, People, SELF, Shondaland, Well + Good and ZORA, just to name a few. To learn more, subscribe to her weekly motivational newsletter at LTintheCity.com and follow her on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/LTintheCity) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/LTintheCity) at @LTintheCity.



“When I learned to meditate, it was always like, I had to get into a chair and I had to have my feet touching the ground and I had to have all these things set. And in Jessamyn’s interview, she was saying that meditation isn’t always this pretty thing that you do... it’s kind of “ugly” [Nyge uses air quotes here]. It’s messy, and it makes sense that it’s messy! I had never thought of it as a messy process before, but it’s so fitting that it’s supposed to be messy! And so that’s something that I really learned from her.” (*Nyge at #BSC Session 1: Adulthood Is Hard*)

2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT

Session #2

The screenshot shows a registration page for a session. On the left, it lists the date and time: 'Wednesday, May 19 6pm ET/3pm PT'. Below that, it specifies the 'Session Length' as '1 hour'. The 'Moderator' is 'Zikora Akanegbu'. The 'Panelists' are 'Thanasi Dilos', 'Zoë Jenkins', and 'Primo Lagaso Goldberg'. At the bottom left is a 'Register Now' button with an external link icon. On the right, the session title 'Fight the Good Fight, But Protect Your Peace' is displayed in large, bold letters. Below the title, it identifies the 'Panel: Mental Health & Activism' and provides a brief description: 'We're talking to Gen Z activists about caring for your mental health while advocating for causes you believe in. Tune in to learn how you can protect your peace while fighting the good fight.'

Panelists:

Thanasi Dilos, co-founder of Civics Unplugged

(thanasi@civicsunplugged.org)

Thanasi Dilos is 18 years old, and a co-founder of [Civics Unplugged](#), a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) social enterprise whose mission is to empower the leaders of Generation Z to build the future of democracy. He is also one of National Geographic's Young Explorers, working to create platforms for youth-led work around the globe. Thanasi is passionate about investing in the future of education, youth empowerment, and our democracy.

Zoë Jenkins, founder and Executive Producer of [Get Schooled](#) podcast

(zoedjenkins@gmail.com) (she/her/hers)

[Zoë Jenkins](#) (she/her) is a 17-year-old changing systems and loving forward. She is a storyteller, facilitator, founder, constant learner, and pie-baker. Zoë is the founder and Executive Producer of [Get Schooled](#) podcast with the [Kentucky Student Voice Team](#), an organization elevating Kentucky students as partners in education research and policy. As a part of her podcasting work, she was named a 2020 National Geographic Young Explorer. Zoë was an inaugural fellow with Civics Unplugged and serves as the Chair of the Civics 2030 Steering Committee. Zoë also founded [DICCE](#), which creates curriculum and resources for Gen Z to be more culturally responsive, empathetic, and equity-driven. As a part of DICCE, Zoë has facilitated workshops with high schools and universities including Stanford's d.school. She will be attending the University of Virginia in the Fall.

Primo Lagaso Goldberg, multimedia creative and DEI advocate

(primo.l.gold@gmail.com) (they/them, he/him)

Primo Lagaso Goldberg is a multimedia creative and DEI advocate based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through writing, art, community building, youth leadership, and policy work they hope to design and create systems, experiences, and spaces where marginalized communities (particularly queer and trans* people of color) can feel validated and safe. They are interested in exploring the ways co-design principles and restorative justice practices can meet for the betterment of the communities and diasporas they call home.

Moderator:

Zikora Akanegbu, founder of GenZHER (info@genzher.org)

Zikora Akanegbu is the 16-year-old founder of GenZHER (www.genzher.org), an entirely student-led organization aimed at empowering Gen-Z girls

2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT

worldwide. Her goal? Changing the world and creating activists out of the next generation by informing them about the world's happenings to spark conversations. She believes in the power of youth to change the world.



“There’s this dangerous notion of clout-chasing, now that you can see what everyone else is doing on social media, like, ‘How do I get popular?’ And I think a great example of that is the black squares everyone posted in June of last year, thinking ‘I’m solving racism everybody, Black-Out Tuesday.’ And it’s like, ‘No, did you go to a protest? Did you donate to a local Black group that needs that support? Are you challenging the norms in your school?’ So I think that’s the real danger of social media, is that it’s empowered performative activism, because it’s so easy to just reshare something or post something or put like the Black Lives Matter card in your website bio on Instagram, and so people think that that’s all they need to do to get more involved. We just need to find a way to use social media for all the things it’s good for, which is amplifying that message but still doing the real work... that doesn’t happen on social media, that happens in these community organizing spaces.”

(Zoe at #BSC Session 2: Fight the Good Fight but Protect your Peace)

Session #3:

The graphic is a promotional card for a session. On the left, it lists the date and time: "Thursday, May 20 6pm ET/3pm PT", the session length "1 hour", and the panelists "Aiyana Ishmael", "Omar Rashad", "Nina Roehl", and "Mia Uzzell". At the bottom left is a "Register Now" button with an external link icon. On the right, the main title is "Let's Get Real! Trying to Keep Cool in Times of Unrest" in large, bold, black font. Below the title is the subtitle "Roundtable: Caring for Your Mental Health as a Student Journalist". At the bottom right, there is a short paragraph of text: "In this candid conversation, YR Media contributors and content creators get honest about what it's really like covering current events as student journalists. Plus, they share tips and best practices about how to care for your mental health while reporting on tough topics."

Panelist:

Aiyana Ishmael, Student Representative for the Online News Association’s Board of Directors (aiyanaishmael14@gmail.com)

Aiyana Ishmael is a Spring 2021 graduate of Florida A&M University (FAMU). She currently serves as the Student Representative for the Online News Association’s Board of Directors. Additionally, Ishmael is a freelance journalist with published pieces in Teen Vogue, Essence, Poynter and The Nation. In March of 2020 Ishmael placed in the Hearst Journalism Awards, Sports Writing competition for her piece: “Coaches’ Kids: Life Behind The Saturday Night Lights.” As a journalist, Ishmael wants to ignite conversation and create change through storytelling. She is a vibrant journalist interested in feature reporting with a passion for covering culture and underrepresented communities.

Mia Uzzell, Managing Editor of FAMU’s magazine, [Journey](#) (miaduzzell@gmail.com)

Mia Uzzell is a sophomore student journalist who currently serves as the managing editor of Florida A&M’s award-winning magazine, [Journey](#). She has written for [Essence](#) and [MEFEater](#) and Teen Vogue. She also works as an opinions editor for her university’s newspaper, an on-air news reporter for

2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT

[WANM 90.5](#), and a documentary filmmaker for her campus' media company. In her free time, she reads with 40 girls across the nation each month over at [Virtual Book Club](#), a digital space for lovers of literature yearning to discover themselves.

Omar Rashad, Lead Data and Investigations Reporter, [Mustang News](#)
(he/him/his) (orashad77@gmail.com)

Omar Rashad is a California-based journalist reporting on the intersections of housing, higher education and state legislation. He is currently the lead data and investigations reporter at Mustang News, the student-run newspaper at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. He is also a reporting fellow covering higher education at the CalMatters College Journalism Network. Rashad is a proud community college graduate and can be found with a cup of green tea at most times during the day.

Moderator:

Nina Roehl, Newsroom Fellow at YR Media (she/her/hers)
(nina@yrmedia.org)

Nina Roehl is a student journalist from San Francisco, CA. She is currently working towards her degree in Communications with a double minor in Human Sexuality and Marketing from San Francisco State University. She is also a Newsroom Fellow at YR Media where she produces both written and audio pieces for publication. Her work has been featured on YR Media, KQED, and KCBwS.



“I think you should believe in your voice, especially if you’re a journalist of color. Please believe in your voice. Because this industry will tell you that there’s this arbitrary standard of objectivity... of distancing yourself from what you’re covering, and it’s so arbitrary and it makes very little sense, because instead of trying to achieve this arbitrary form of neutrality we should be trying to center humanity in the people we cover and the communities we cover. The more we distance ourselves from the people that we cover, the more distance we are from their humanity, and I think that is really what we should be striving towards... Please know that your identity matters and your identity strengthens the journalism and it’s very easy to feel otherwise and it’s very easy to give into people that say otherwise, but please know that there is value in your voice and you should definitely be telling those stories that you want to be telling.”

(Omar at #BSC Session 3: Let’s Get Real! Trying to Keep Cool In Times of Unrest)

2.1.4 CASE STUDY 3: BEYOND SELF-CARE SUMMIT

Feedback from Youth Stakeholders:

Youth stakeholders shared how powerful and positive it was to have a mental health and well-being event that was for youth and by youth:



"I really **admired how it kind of skewed more student focused**... I think there's a lot of places in the world right now where students are being talked at and not being spoken with."

(Thanasi, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21)



"It was an awesome experience and I've already connected with and set up a meeting with two other youth panelists from the event. It's always great to connect with other young people that are passionate about the things that I am, working on mental health and well-being reporting; and it was **so great to have a space for youth mental health and well-being conversations that are with and by and center young people**..

That puts youth at the center." *(Primo, stakeholder interview, 6.30.21)*

The youth stakeholders also noted how important it was to have an event that was focused on **normalizing youth mental health and well-being conversations**. They acknowledged how harmful isolation can be when dealing with these experiences, whether in their own lives, in their reporting, or both — and they saw the Beyond Self-Care Summit as a way to build community. Interviewees noted:



"You kind of realize that you're not alone in your own experience... **I'm not the only one that is also shouldering, like, the trauma of marginalized communities**." *(Mia, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21)*



"I think that's what people want. **You just want to hear people be honest and speak from the heart, especially when it's something so, so personal**, I think... I think that the mental health summit was extremely genuine." *(Nyge, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21)*



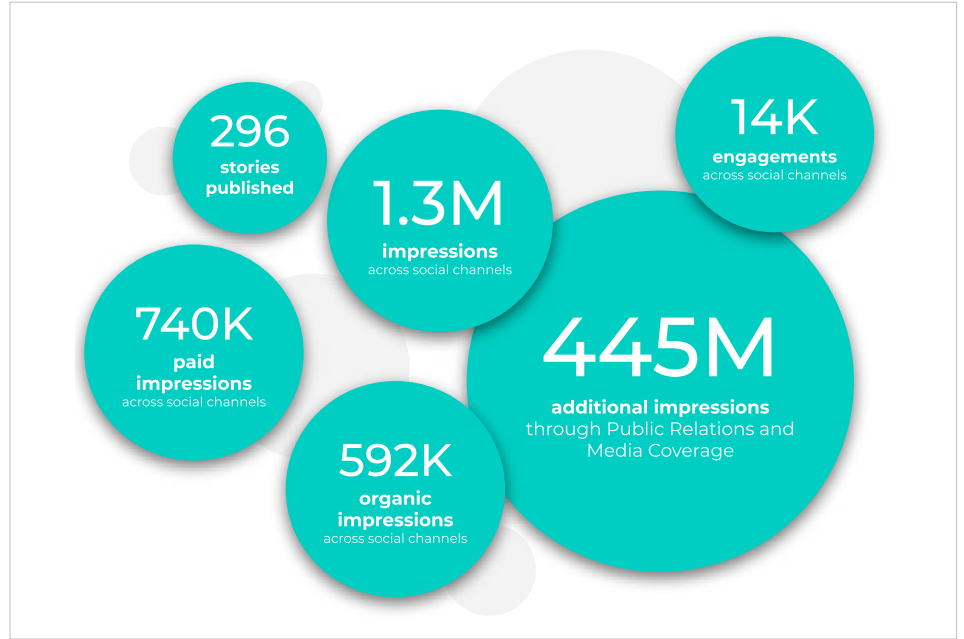
"Like I have personally found a lot of impact from talking about and listening to others about their personal experiences."

(Omar, stakeholder interview, 6.29.21)

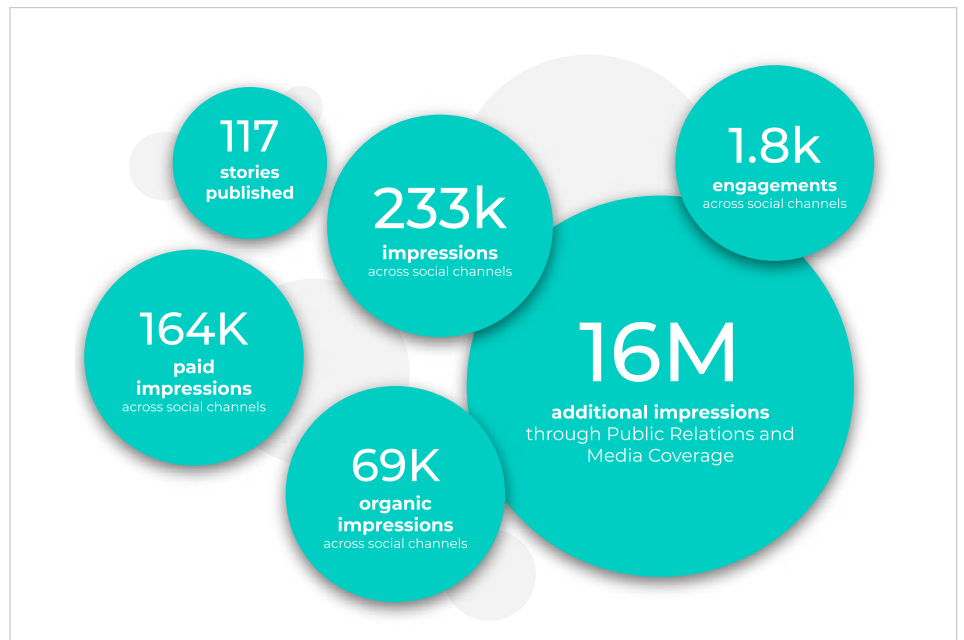
2.2 PERFORMANCE METRICS

YR MEDIA RAN A NUMBER OF CAMPAIGNS to build momentum and audience for our mental health and well-being content, with the following highlights:

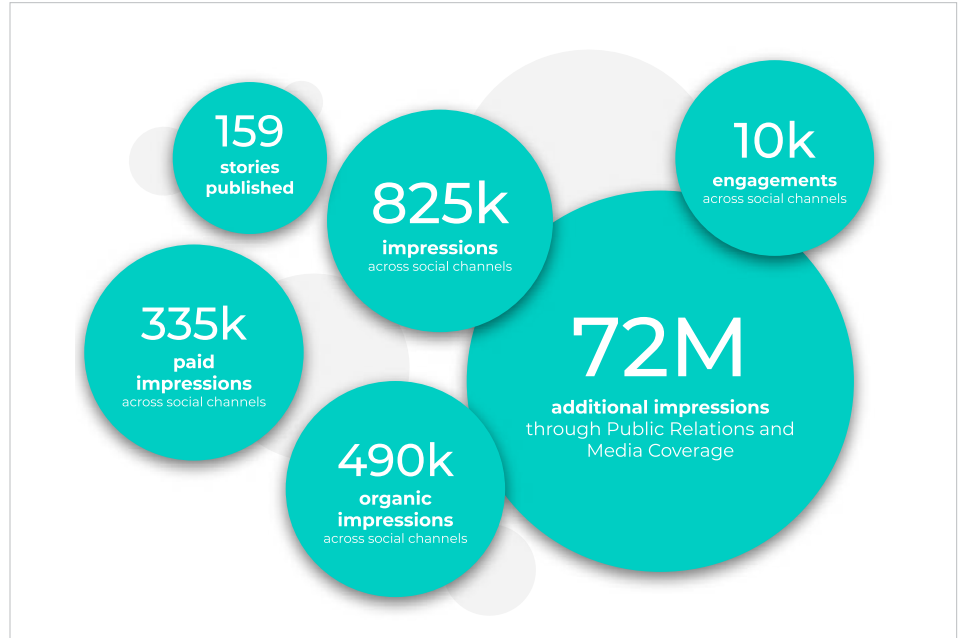
During the Grant Period Overall Metrics on MH/WB Content



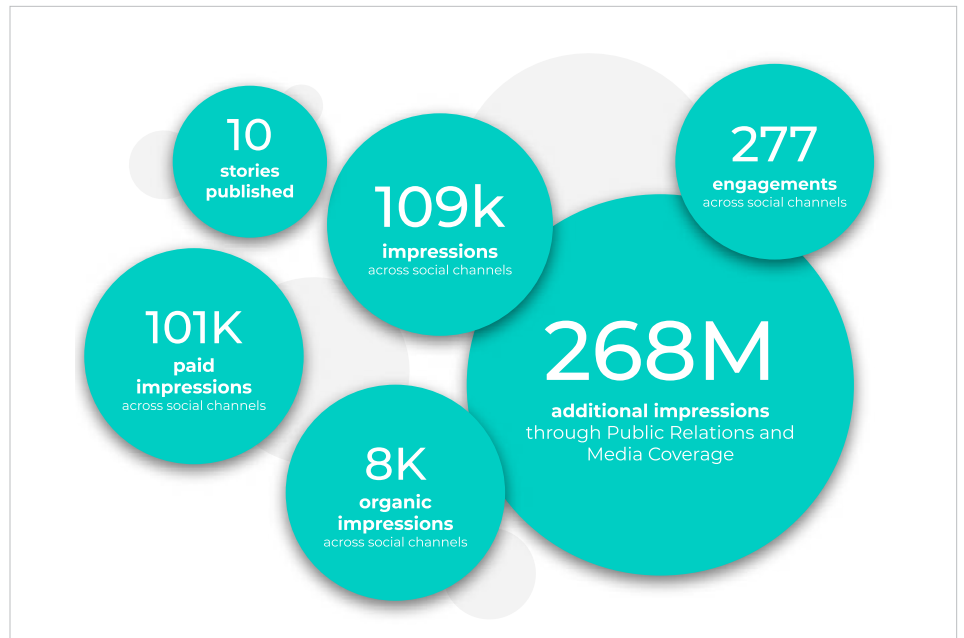
By Campaign: Mental Health Stories (editorial)



2.2
PERFORMANCE METRICS



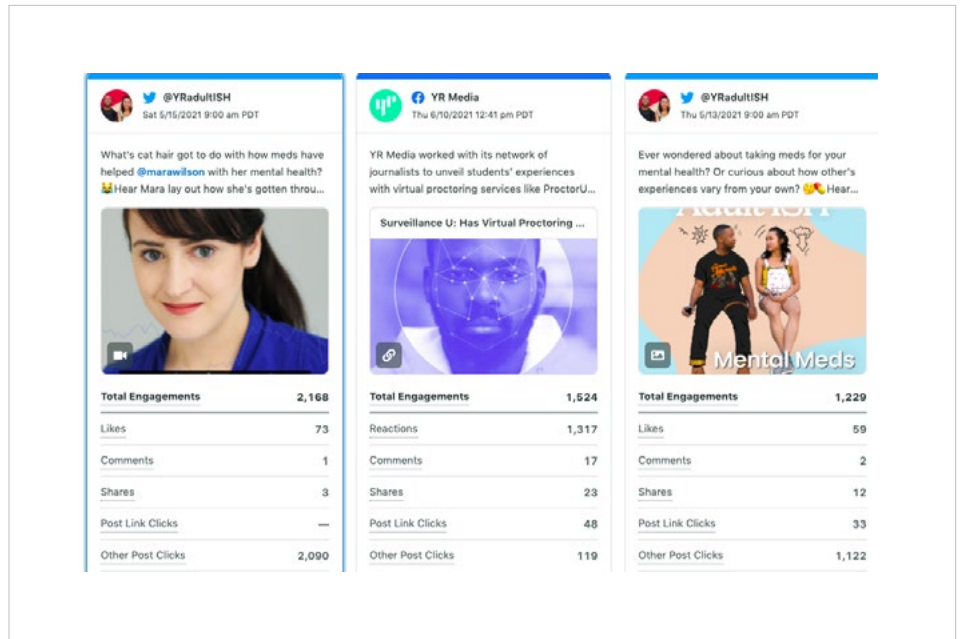
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Adult Ish Podcast



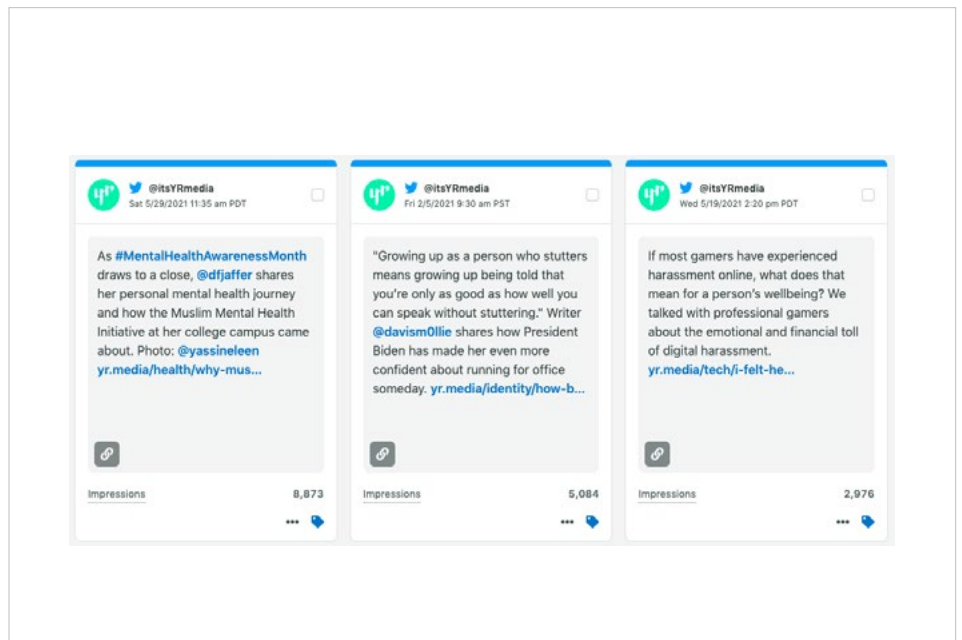
By Campaign:
Unadopted

2.2 PERFORMANCE METRICS

Top Performing Posts During the Grant Period



Top Performing Posts: Mental Health Stories



FOR THE MENTAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN, we focused our efforts on driving people to YR Media’s site, where they could experience the rich content in full. While we saw more engagement on Stories, the Facebook feed drove the highest click through rate at the lowest cost per click. Across all three placements, the Instagram feed proved to be lowest performing. For this campaign, we utilized aWebsite Visitors Look alike audience and built off that with mental health related interests and behaviors. We found that boosted social content was an effective tool for amplifying the message. Our recommendation is to test boosted content and leverage organic content to further engage with audiences and continue the conversation sparked by young people’s storytelling. Facebook should be used to share long-form content and articles. Instagram Stories should be used for hard-hitting short-form content.

2.3 BEST PRACTICES

2.3.1 QUALITIES & PROCESS OF EDITOR & PRODUCTION TEAM

WHILE UNEQUIVOCALLY YOUTH-CENTERED, YR Media's model is based on youth-adult collaboration and collegiality, which includes pairing contributors with editors. Certain qualities of the editor are necessary to produce youth mental health and well-being coverage that is ethical, relevant and of high quality. Both youth and adult stakeholders raised this point. Creating an environment of openness and trust; leading with editorial equity and supporting youth agency; and taking a humanizing approach to supporting youth contributors were key themes that emerged from interviews.



Cultivating these positive dynamics requires time, intentionality, and having “empathy, compassion and a willingness to learn and to listen and to grow” (*L’Oreal, stakeholder interview, 6.22.21*).

These qualities need to be embedded in the institutional structures of the organization:



“The leadership of whoever somebody is working for, you know, **a very open minded approach and there has to be an environment of trust...** where the truth can come out and it’s not going to be squashed.” (*Dr. Primm, external advocacy stakeholder interview, 6.25.21*)



“I think it starts with the platform and then **also it starts with the amount of trust that YR has in its young people.**” (*Nyge, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21*)

It is essential to center editorial equity when doing youth mental health and well-being reporting:



“The **editorial equity** that’s here, that isn’t there in most newsrooms... The young person really needs to have the full buy-in and feel good about what’s going out in the world; to the point where we can go all the way down a process and even walk away from The New York Times or NPR if at a certain point in the editorial process, the young people do not feel invested anymore or do not feel like it’s the story they want to tell... how you make sure that the **young person feels enough agency** too. It’s almost like **you have to spend more time reiterating how much this is theirs**, that **they have ultimate say in their storytelling**, because I think some of it’s just trying to make sure that people don’t just cede power to you.” (*YR Media Executive Producer Rebecca, stakeholder interview, 6.21.21*)



Senior Editor of Mental Health and Well-Being, L’Oreal Thompson Payton echoes these sentiments regarding the need to take a humanizing approach: “The editors that I work with, that I love the most and have enjoyed working with the most, **always check on me as a person first.**” (*L’Oreal, stakeholder interview, 6.22.21*)

2.3.1 QUALITIES & PROCESS OF EDITOR & PRODUCTION TEAM

Q&A w/ L'Oreal Thompson Payton, Senior Editor Mental Health & Well-Being

Q) As an editor, when focusing on mental health and well-being, what do you look for in pitches? What kind of content do you want more of? And then on the other side, what do you think we need to see less of or should go away entirely?

A) What I look for are pitches of diversity, first and foremost, the diversity of voices and the person who is telling the story and diversity in the content that is being covered. So I think, going to what's missing... There tends to be, or at least what I've observed in the last few years, there are a lot of stories that focus on the things you think about when someone says mental health and well-being: a lot around meditation and mindfulness. And on the other hand, there tend to be a lot of stories that confer some of the "problems" or issues that come along with eating disorders, anxiety, or depression, like the kind of headlines that you think about when you hear "mental health and well-being." And even within those stories, they tend to center white people and white women in particular. And there is that narrative that it creates for other people who don't identify as white, OK, this space isn't really for me or these stories don't pertain to me when we know that anxiety, depression and eating disorders, et cetera, do not discriminate according to gender, race, age. So that's something that I was very cognizant of and wanted to make sure we highlighted when I started in this role, was that there's more to mental health than just that. So the stories that we've covered have ranged from Montero by Lil Nas X and the video for the song and conversations about sexuality and LGBTQI+ well-being, to Meghan Markle's interview with Oprah and Britney Spears' experience when she was growing up and dealing with misogyny in the music industry and beyond that ... So it's not always so severe or traumatic or rooted in something that is bad or wrong. But there is room for everyone in these conversations.

Q) Mental health stories can be told in a variety of ways. Are there any formats or platforms that you've come across that you found especially impactful?

A) I am someone who definitely believes that there are many ways to tell a story, and even though my chosen medium is as a writer, especially in this day and age, we have YouTube videos, we have podcasts, we have social media, like TikTok is a form of storytelling. And so I don't think there is one right way to tell a story. And the more that we can dismantle that idea of "they have to be this way and look like this and fit into this box," that makes it a more equitable process. It creates more room for other content creators who maybe don't have access to those fancy cameras, like they have their phone so they can record, or you use whatever is available to you.

Q) What are some of the goals you have for the mental health content that you or your collaborators produce?

A) Being open to different kinds of pitches, like I said, they weren't centered around the traditional mental health stories that you think of and I definitely wanted to make sure that we elevated diverse voices. And so there was a particular focus on my end as well, to seek out writers from different backgrounds who are people of color, black, indigenous, who are LGBTQI+, who geographically are from outside the major media hubs. New York, L.A., Chicago get a lot of love - OK, what about our young people in the South? What do they want to hear about? What about our

2.3.1 QUALITIES & PROCESS OF EDITOR & PRODUCTION TEAM

people in more rural communities? What are they talking about? Which is making sure that we had different voices at the table contributing to the content so that it wasn't sounding like me, but was really representative of the people who were contributing and also reading it. I wanted to make sure that our contributors' demographics and makeup mirrored that of the readers we're trying to reach as well. And so I just wanted to make sure that the content that we were putting out met their needs and their goals and what they were talking about and what they're interested in, because it's not about us (adults) at the end of the day. Our role as editors and as an organization is as a facilitator. Sure. But at the end of the day, it's not about us and nor should it be. So the goal is always to create content that our readers care about, that our contributors feel proud about as well. I think what's important is they have a piece in a portfolio that they can stand by like, yeah, I did that and I'm really proud of myself. And this is why removing all ego and expectations and everything from that to set them up for success was the ultimate goal.

Q) In centering intersectionality, what does it mean to do mental health coverage for you that focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and intersectional storytelling?

A) I mean, I think in general, in media, I see this every day... I spend all day on Twitter. It is a very white industry and I recognize the privilege that I even had in going to private school, being able to do unpaid internships, gave me a leg up after I graduated and was able to land positions in different newsrooms. And not everyone has that same access. And so that's the whole systemic issue and it's problematic because great storytellers are everywhere. You don't have to go to an Ivy League. You don't need to intern for Condé Nast in order for your story to hold value and for your voice to be worth hearing. And so I think that focus on DEI and intersectional storytelling is just for me, it's obvious... Why wouldn't you do that? ... Because I do believe our young people already have the power. It's not, we're not swooping in and saving them and granting them the magical power. They've already got it. Our role is to help boost that and to create space for them where they might not otherwise be given the chance, to give them access, to give them opportunity and to mentor them along the way. For me, that's been the most fulfilling part of this, where it's like here are some things I've learned after doing this for 13, 15 years, where you can learn it in your early 20s, late teens, coming into this industry. Then that's even better to save you some of that time and some of that heartache.

Q) What does it mean to do mental health coverage that focuses on dismantling white supremacy and decentering whiteness in mental health and well-being spaces, reporting, coverage?

A) I was listening to the conversations that youth are having on Twitter and other socials and noticing the topics that they're talking about and bringing that to the newsroom, advocating on their behalf, because it's like we're (adult editors) in the room where it happens and they're not always. And so that's part of my role as well, to bring that to the attention of all the different editors. And it is a slower process perhaps than a lot of newsrooms are used to. Definitely different from when I myself was a reporter, in the newsroom. Things are very fast-paced and deadlines are like "do or die." ... At a previous organization I learned about what white supremacy is and how it shows up in the workplace. And even translating that to my experience in the newsroom, and I'm doing a lot of that in how we do things with the Beyond Self-Care campaign and editorship. And it does require a slower and more mindful approach. It's more collaborative.

2.3.1 QUALITIES & PROCESS OF EDITOR & PRODUCTION TEAM

It's not a dictatorship at all. We should be very collaborative in working hand-in-hand with the reporter and valuing their voice, making sure that when you make edits that they are in line with what the writer would say, giving them an opportunity to review, to weigh in on the [featured image]. And if they need an extension on a story, working with them on that and honoring them and recognizing that they are people outside of this story. Like, yes, they are contributing something of great value to the organization but/and they have their own responsibilities. They are students, they have families, they have jobs even. It's not just us. So calling out that perfectionism and rigidity in deadlines as dehumanizing at times is important, and taking a different approach. I had an editor, who I'm very grateful for, who said something like, "Hey, you know, it's not life or death over here and we're not curing cancer... You need some more time on a story. Take the time." And I remember feeling a rush of relief as a writer, at least doing that, especially as a Black woman, because there is that "work twice as hard to have it" mentality, rooted in double-standards of white supremacy. You feel like you can't take a break or you can't let someone down or you can't ask for the extension. And what that editor did was give me the room to breathe, to take up space, and to take my time. And I feel like showing our young people, modeling that as well, is so important. So recently, working with a writer, I was like, "Hey, listen, I'm behind on editing these stories and if you need another week for yours that's fine, because I'm not going to get to it for now." Yeah. So just being honest and treating them as colleagues because it's not just like a give or take, but we're really partners in this work and we're working together in a way that honors them and their voice. I feel like this is the goal.

Q) In doing this work, what does it mean to do mental health and well-being coverage that's focused on social and emotional learning?

A) Yeah, it is constantly changing. I mean, we learn and we get new information every day, especially being in the midst of a global pandemic, I think everything is just heightened. So extending myself grace, I think first and foremost, because it's very much that airplane rule to apply your own oxygen mask. You know, I'm not going to be any good to our writers, to my colleagues if I am running on empty. So it's up to me to make sure that I fill my cup and I'm not taking on too much. And that goes back to the modeling as well for our writers, because I worked with another outlet that was mental health and well-being focused. And I burned out because I was writing stories every week. And it was kind of an oxymoron or ironic. And so I learned from that and wanted to make sure that in this role that I'm modeling that behavior and encouraging it in my writers as well "You need some more time on this? That's fine. How are you doing as a person?" Like it sounds kind of weird probably to say out loud, but I follow my writers on Twitter and Instagram and I would check their feeds and their stories to see what was going on with them at any particular moment, before I followed up on something, to make sure that there wasn't something I was missing. Like maybe it's exam week and that's why they have fallen out of communication, or they have a personal thing going on. So I would just kind of do a little research before reaching out, just to check on them as a person, like: "How are you doing?" And then following up and even in the emails, like "Need more space or time? Just let me know." Creating that space for them to be human I think is important ... It's not from the top down, it's like, hey, we're partners in this, in the storytelling process, so how can I support you and make this feel like a good process for you? And that hopefully keeps them coming and makes them want to work with YR Media again. And if not, it influences how they move going forward in other newsrooms or outlets and shows

2.3.2 DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION (DEI)

them what's possible. And I do have hope that these larger legacy outlets can change. And I think they will have to if they want to keep up with everything that's going on and attract these talented Gen Z writers and contributors. They have to show up differently. They have to do things differently. And if we can be at the forefront of that movement, then that's really special.

From Pitch to Publish: Editing Mental Health/Well-Being Content with Care

By L'Oreal Thompson Payton

When it comes to content, editing with empathy is typically a nice-to-have, but when you factor in young people and mental health content, editing with empathy is a must-have. So how do you do it?

While there's no exact science, most of the best practices can be boiled down to the Golden Rule: treat others the way you want to be treated. Sure, there are nuances and ethics involved, but to quote the prolific Lauryn Hill, "it could all be so simple."

Outlined below are the steps I've used to gather trust, cultivate meaningful relationships with contributors and ultimately produce creative, trendy, and engaging content with some of the world's most talented young writers:

Observe.

As someone who's highly active on social media, I'm constantly taking note of up-and-coming writers. Even before signing on with YR Media, I'd created a private list on Twitter featuring mental health and well-being writers I'd like to work with someday. Once I was on board, I slid into their DMs (Direct Messages), introduced myself, told them a bit about my role and YR, shared our going rates and asked if they'd be interested in contributing.

Cast a wide net.

After I'd reached out to the writers on my private Twitter list, I posted a [thread](#) announcing my role as the new mental health editor at YR Media; what kind of stories we're looking for; how to pitch and, most importantly when sharing a call for pitches, the rate.

I also tagged organizations/accounts that focus primarily on underrepresented writers, such as @WritersofColor, @LatinxWriters, @NABJ, @NAHJ and @aaja. Additionally, the tweet received 332 likes; 50,852 impressions; and 2,225 total engagements. It was also shared in writer Sonia Weiser's popular [Opportunities of the Week](#) newsletter, which led to an influx of pitches received in the org-wide [Google form](#).

I believe sharing the rate upfront (along with the typical word count) is especially important given the notoriously predatory nature of journalism (free internships, outlets that offer \$25 for 1,000 words, etc.). Additionally, the transparency regarding rates positions YR Media as an equitable and credible organization.

Work with writers.

Once pitches were submitted, I worked with writers to help them refine their pitch, voice and angle of the story. Oftentimes, this involved meeting with writers via Zoom or on a phone call to better understand their ideas and offer guidance for improvement.

For newer writers, I'd ask them to send an outline of the piece following

2.3.2 DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION (DEI)

our call to ensure both parties were on the same page. Once they submitted a draft, I made a copy of their original submission to track changes.

There are two reasons for this: 1) as a writer myself, I know firsthand the anxiety and agony of seeing someone else in your document, especially as Google notifies you of every change. I'd rather present all of the changes at once and 2) creating a copy saves a version of their original work in case they want to refer to it on the second draft and/or for future pieces.

I also prefer switching to "Suggesting" mode when editing so that they can see the changes I made and choose whether they want to accept or reject them, which provides the writer with autonomy and ensures the final piece is in their voice. As a writer, I've also found it helpful to know why changes are made rather than an editor arbitrarily making edits because "they know better," which makes the editing process more collaborative than dictatorial.

Listen to (and learn from) writers.

I often think about [this tweet](#) from one of my favorite editors, Anna Maltby, regarding the arbitrary nature of deadlines. Sure, if a piece is timely, that's different. But for the most part, especially when it comes to mental health and well-being content, stories can often be evergreen. Being flexible when it comes to deadlines (knowing students are juggling a lot as it is with schoolwork and personal obligations, not to mention a global pandemic) is key to being an empathetic editor.

I also provide them with the opportunity to weigh in on the final copy, as well as feature images, to ensure the piece is representative of their voice and values. This requires understanding that as editors we don't always know best, being humble enough to admit when we get it wrong and brave enough to do better next time. It's an extra step that can go a long way toward contributors feeling like part of a team rather than a worker bee.

Respect writers (and pay them accordingly).

Part of my role as an editor has been dismantling the old guard of media that took advantage of young writers by exploiting their talent. When working with young people, it's important that they're given the same professional consideration as adults. This means listening to and incorporating their feedback; compensating them for their time and expertise (as we've done with their editorial contributions, as well as speaking engagements, such as the Beyond Self-Care Summit. Just because you're young doesn't mean you should "pay your dues" (aka work for free).

Following publication, I email writers to let them know their piece is live and I also share detailed instructions on how to submit their invoice. I also, whenever possible, tag their social media profiles in the caption to help boost their profiles as well. Sure, the story is posted on YR's website, but it's only because of their brainpower.

At the end of the day, the editorial process should be a collaborative effort from the moment the pitch is sent to after it's published online.

2.3.3 FROM TRAUMA-INFORMED TO HEALING-CENTERED

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING coverage and conversations must be rooted in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI). The diversity of contributors and themes that intersect with other issues (e.g., race, LGBTQ, popular culture) is fundamental to building a 360-degree mental health and well-being desk. Mental health isn't a stand-alone "beat," but a lens across the full range of coverage that appeals to teens and young adults from various backgrounds and interests. Some examples include coverage of the [Meghan Markle interview](#) with Oprah earlier this year; an essay about the importance of [mental health in the Muslim community](#); and commentary on [Lil Nas X's "Montero" video](#). Intersectional storytelling centers mental health and well-being coverage through the lens of themes and identities young people care about.

Representation matters. When people are able to see themselves and their identities represented in mental health stories, it helps to break down barriers to access and care:



"I think just feeling like you're not alone, like something isn't just wrong with you and you're not... like other people are dealing with stuff too, so **when you see that representation, it brings a sense of comfort and then also might push you in a way where you might be more open to seeking help.** I mean, I think everybody is saying right now, representation is key, **but not just in skin color or how you identify. It's more than that. I think it's also those things... Plus how you feel inside.** Yeah. And I think that takes it to the next level. When you see somebody who looks like you and is from your community and feels like you!"
([Nyge, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21](#))



"Having our young people tell their own stories, particularly in BIPOC, LGBTQ communities, **in a space or industry that doesn't always value their voices, could definitely do a better job of doing so!**"
([L'Oreal, stakeholder interview, 6.22.21](#))



"I think what's most important there is to engage scholars, activists, leaders of all different types to inform that... who are a part of those cultural groups that you're focusing on... kind of a **nothing about us without us.**" ([Dr. Primm, stakeholder interview, 6.25.21](#))

Representation in mental health and well-being reporting must be intersectional in its approach. Intersectionality in representation involves acknowledging that one's identity is not one thing or the other but rather a complex web of identities that shape one's experiences in the world. The experience of a white cis-heterosexual women navigating the world, and particularly mental health and well-being, will be very different from that of a Black queer trans woman. Interview participants reflected on the need for intersectional representation:



"**As a person of color, as a queer person, as a non binary person, when it comes to struggling with mental health, there is a huge tendency to feel isolated** and to feel alone in your specific struggle experience, because like, you know, **as a queer person of color, I experience the world very differently,** and so there's a lot of things that feel very specific to me and a lot of **specific challenges that I come up against because of both my queer and my of color identity** and because that feels so personal and so specific, there's a lot of tendency of, for myself and like for a lot of my community as well, to feel isolated in the struggles that we're facing. And **while we don't want to generalize, there is still a lot of value in finding solidarity** [with] those with whom you share identities and who have similar experiences to you. I think that right there is the gold ticket. That's the key thing that is amazing about

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having queer people, people of color, young people speaking to other young people about their experiences is that it not eliminates, but **it can mediate that feeling of isolation and that feeling of aloneness, because suddenly we see this person and they're like, oh, yeah, I also have those experiences, like with internalized homophobia or internalized racism.** I also have felt uncomfortable in people of color spaces because of my queerness and **seeing and hearing someone talk about that and then recognizing that while they're not the same person as you, they can still empathize and relate to your specific struggles as a queer person of color — that in and of itself, I think is very valuable and is more than enough reason to continue bringing queer voices, the voices of young people into the youth mental health advocacy space.**

(Primo, stakeholder interview, 6.30.21)



“I think oftentimes it’s hard for us to be transparent when diversity is not there. Like we can’t talk about intersectionality when it is not present... you want me to pull out all of my trauma, book it for you, so you can have this huge compelling story that gets all these views on your site, but then you don’t have people like me that edit my story or who’s a managing editor.” *(Mia, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21)*

Decentering whiteness and dismantling white supremacy in mental health and well-being spaces: Too often, mental health and well-being spaces have centered white voices and concerns in a way that is limiting and harmful to BIPOC communities. Decentering whiteness attends to the diverse issues and needs that BIPOC populations experience that impact their mental health and well-being. This work involves:

- Embedding culturally relevant and responsive practices
- Taking a humanizing, holistic, collaborative approach to the newsroom process rather than the traditional top-down, rigidly hierarchical approach
- Producing stories that reflect the diversity of readers and intersectional issues
- Supporting youth contributors to have agency in their reporting

Stakeholder interviewees weighed in on these themes:



“I think just by default and the fact that most of our creators are BIPOC, our focus is going to be that and you know, **looking at all of these things through a cultural lens that are really different from a white lens** in a lot of cases.” *(Rebecca, stakeholder interview, 6.21.21)*



“For **the young people who were just, you know, appalled and infuriated by what they were seeing in society** [referencing the racial justice uprisings in the summer of 2020], for them **to go protest - peacefully - to me, that was a mentally healthy response** because it was **seeing that something wasn’t right and having the agency to do something about it.**” *(Dr. Primm, stakeholder interview, 6.25.21)*

2.3.3 FROM TRAUMA-INFORMED TO HEALING-CENTERED

CARE FOR CONTRIBUTORS is a fundamental commitment that distinguishes YR Media. “We’re not your average newsroom,” one of our contributors noted.

An immense body of multidisciplinary research underscores the need for social and emotional development, mental health resources, positive relationships with peers and adults, and leadership skills for youth to realize their full potential. As our participants — primarily BIPOC teens and young adults who are unfairly burdened by systemic barriers — take on the demanding tasks of journalism and media production, they deserve an environment that provides holistic care. As an organization, YR Media is committed to providing the tools and resources necessary for them to thrive. Further, those resources should be shaped by the youth themselves, giving young people agency in their own wellness journey. We deeply believe that by expanding access to social and emotional support, we also expand access to vital career pathways and opportunities.

Taking a [healing-centered](#) approach to mental health and well-being reporting with youth involves **finding joy and hope in the journey**. As clinical psychologist and advocate, Dr. Primm discussed in her interview, “When we were talking about the trauma stuff and being **healing centered, culturally affirming, but also strength based...** I think it’s important for young people to think about, you know, **what are they good at? What do they enjoy doing? What is their genius, their gift? ... To really be conscious of that. And also what brings them joy?**” ([Dr. Primm, stakeholder interview, 6.25.21](#)). At YR Media and other spaces where young people create narratives on their terms, we have the opportunity to support them in sharing their storytelling gifts with the world.

Another best practice for healing-centered reporting on youth mental health and well-being is **humanizing the process**. This can involve “snooping on contributors’ socials to make sure they’re ok and not overloaded with other life stuff or being a student, before checking in on deadlines.” ([L’Oreal, stakeholder interview, 6.22.21](#)). It is important for newsrooms to account for the impact that mental health and well-being reporting has on youth reporters and provide real-time resources and tools. As YR Media’s Executive Producer Rebecca noted in her stakeholder interview, newsrooms need to consider “what’s available to those young people when they get triggered by something or they need some mental health care? ... And so I do think as an organization, we have to think about what are some drop-in scenarios? Are there things that can be available to people in that process that are, you know, that are designed in a way that work for more ad hoc story production.” ([Rebecca, stakeholder interview, 6.21.21](#)).

Many stakeholder interview participants also suggested a best practice protocol of following up with youth contributors after they have published a story on a sensitive topic, offering “check-ins afterwards and having people around, you know, mental health professionals or therapists or other support people... Also, what some people do is they list hotlines and crisis lines and other resources, so that if people are feeling triggered, they could utilize those resources” ([Dr. Primm, stakeholder interview, 6.25.21](#)). Adult ISH podcast host Nyge echoed Dr. Primm’s sentiments: “That would be an incredible thing, if after stories were created, people did these follow ups with the subject of these stories and the storytellers just to see like where they’re at and just check in and follow up and see how they’re doing” ([Nyge, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21](#)). Taking a healing-centered approach to mental health and well-being reporting involves providing real supports for youth contributors, both during and after the production process.

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A note from the editor... on collaborating with contributors as a healing-centered best practice, especially when producing mental health and well-being content with, by and for youth. The production team should view contributors as co-collaborators or partners in putting out the work. The editor is not always right and does not have all the answers. Senior Editor of Mental Health and Well-Being, L'Oreal Thompson Payton reflects:



“One of the many lessons I learned during my time at YR Media is the importance of seeking and following contributor input regarding visuals in the publishing process. Specifically, it is important to get their feedback on feature images that accompany a story before publishing.

Earlier in my tenure, I was working on a story about [recovering from an eating disorder during the pandemic](#). Initially, I'd chosen an illustration from Getty Images that featured two young women sitting on the floor with a scale and snacks strewn about in an effort to keep the image neutral (aka not select an image featuring real people/models and thus give the impression that they have/had an eating disorder).

My manager and I discussed getting input from the writer ahead of time; however, I did not hear back from her before the piece was slated to go live. Once the published story was shared with the writer, she informed me she didn't agree with the image that was used, stating: “Sorry, I don't really like the mood of this image. I envisioned it being a bit more hopeful and calming ... I feel like the image communicates the opposite feeling that I was trying to relay to readers.” I apologized to the writer immediately and worked with our team to swap the image to the [current one](#) featured with the story.

From this experience, we learned that it's important to bake in additional time during the publishing process for writers to review and provide input on the headline of a given article, as well as the feature image, especially when covering sensitive topics.

We implemented this practice recently while publishing an article about [Muslim mental health](#) and built in ample time for the writer to contribute her thoughts, which resulted in her submitting an image of herself to accompany the article and therefore feel more autonomy over the story.

In another case, there was discussion among staff members regarding which image to use for an article about [mental illness and the COVID-19 vaccine](#). It was my preference and editorial instinct to use a stock image depicting a vaccine vial for similar reasons to the eating disorder story and not suggesting the person pictured has a mental illness; however, a colleague wished to use a picture of a person to make the story feel more relatable. While a valid consideration, the suggested picture included an Asian woman, which I felt would be inappropriate given the rise of anti-Asian crimes since the onset of COVID-19. Ultimately, we settled on the [current image](#), which depicts a person looking out the window.

Throughout this process, we learned that the images that accompany a story are just as, if not more important than the words themselves as the image and the headline are often what grabs the reader's attention in the first place. Also, including writers in the process, especially young writers, offers them a sense of autonomy that may not be found in other newsrooms.”



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YR Media created a one-page document, collaboratively with a youth contributor, outlining a **best practice protocol for narrative production with system engaged youth**:

YR Media's Approach to Narrative Production with System Engaged Youth

You know your story the best, we are just helping you tell it so it engages audiences and your peers. YR Media editors are here to support the technical and journalistic/narrative process, but will never tell your story for you.

Once you start your storytelling journey, an editor gives you notes and suggestions, and helps you sharpen your narrative. At any point, if you don't like a change/edit, **feel free to have a conversation** (or make notes in the shared Google doc) with your concerns!

We won't publish anything that you haven't reviewed and approved. Sometimes we work with news outlets that change headlines or descriptions, and we can advocate for you. Note: we can't always change their choices, but we often can when there's a problem.

Like many other media outlets, we have a fact-checking process which includes; requesting documents, confirming facts with other people via the phone, and other methods. We strive for our young contributors and creators to understand how to meet industry standards. How we do this is also part of the co-creation process. We can work **with you** on the most comfortable ways to check details. We can also adjust some of the writing to be more "vague" if the specific details are too hard to confirm. We never want you to feel overwhelmed with the process.

At YR Media, we give you space to dictate the process and what you are willing to share. We offer thought partnership around topics, themes and language and if things become difficult during the process, we have extended support services.

2.3.4 DIGITAL AFTERLIFE

IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER the digital afterlife of mental health and well-being stories: the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes for creators and audiences, once content is published. Young people reporting on these themes are putting themselves out there and should be prepared and supported for what may happen once audiences start engaging with their narratives.

YR Media podcast host and contributor, Nyge Turner, shares his experience after writing about a family relationship and navigating its digital afterlife:



“There were a lot of things that we (Nyge & his co-host, Merk Nguyen) didn’t know that come with creating stories that go national. Like I did a story on me and my mom’s relationship changing with the progression of her early-onset Alzheimer’s. And when I did that story, I had no idea that, like... I didn’t even think about the family that we had in other states, like reaching out to me, hearing about, you know, her for the first time and her being in this condition and people discovering that their family member was gone on the radio... Honestly, I would have still done the story, but I probably would have reached out first. Or I would’ve just been **proactive about the situation instead of reactive**, which I ended up having to be, because **I was working with a ton of producers who have done amazing work producing, but not many other storytellers who had done these big, powerful stories and kind of received the backlash from it also**. And so I think you have to surround people with people who have done these stories before, who have done this type of coverage before, because then it’s just so many other things that you can warn people about and just prepare people for. **I think you’ll still end up getting people creating the same content**, but it’ll probably just be **done in a way where they protect themselves and their family a little bit more**, knowing what they’re getting themselves into. Because I think, you know, when somebody says a story is going to go national or whatever, you’re going to be on the radio or this and that, like you, you might think, ‘I hope so.’ But it’s probably just going to be heard by people around here or whatever. And honestly, a lot of stories *are* just heard by people around you, but then you get the ones that just stick out, that just kind of go and you’re like, ‘Wow, I had no idea that was going to have that type of reach.’ And now everybody’s like blowing up my phone about this, and you know, I was wishing I could have had some of these conversations before I let this out to the world... And so I think that’s what people need in creating it and then also, I kind of just got really fortunate to have a lot of really talented people around me. When you connect young people with these resources, with extremely talented producers and with people who have been there before, I think you’re giving them all the information so that they can make the decision for themselves or they can create a story and have all the information that comes with creating a story and releasing it to the world.” (Nyge, stakeholder interview, 6.24.21)

YR Media has a decades-long history supporting young people as they decide what to share with national audiences about their own lived experiences in relation to a number of topics. Mental health presents particular challenges, because older generations can be a great deal more cautious than Gen-Z creators, when it comes to opening up about personal struggles. We see our role as talking extensively with young people about



2.3.4 **DIGITAL AFTERLIFE**

their thought processes on what to reveal and with what level of detail. We remind them that no one is entitled to their story. It is for them to decide what they need others to know. We have learned to make sure they've had the necessary conversations with loved ones and support providers, as well as anyone who appears in their stories, before they make final decisions. We work through scenarios about how their stories might be received and what it will mean for potentially painful parts of their lives to be permanently searchable and "on the record." We discuss strategies for allowing them maximum agency in shaping their narratives, not just in the present but also in the future, as their relationships to the events and feelings they describe will inevitably evolve. We listen for why it's important to them to share their experiences with mental health. They often tell us a key motivator is to ensure that other young people feel less alone than perhaps they have. And then we advocate with and for our creators with adult gate-keepers (including editors at some of our partner outlets) to arrive at a finished product young people feel proud of and prepared to stand behind as they go forward with their lives.

Conclusion

3.0 CONCLUSION: FUTURE ACTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

AS A RESULT of the Narrative Change and Impact Project, YR Media raised the visibility of youth voices and fostered rich, far-reaching, and culturally sustaining conversations about mental health. Through our findings, research and documentation of best practices, we aim to advance youth well-being via: multi-modal youth media creation, dissemination by youth for youth, and authentic youth-led conversations.

In sum, we close with key takeaways from this initiative, designed to inform transformative work at the intersection of media and youth mental health:

- Young people are documenting and driving a shift in public attitudes toward mental health. They are opening up and calling for equity-driven systems and changes to the way we live to promote well-being.
- Young people want mental health and well-being content across a rich range of platforms. Their coverage of these themes takes shape in personal essays, investigations, themed playlists, podcast episodes, video commentaries, interactive experiences, live events, and more. The tone is equally diverse, from serious to irreverent.
- Mental health and well-being stories intersect with every other news beat: politics, culture, identity, the economy, technology, and so on. Young people don't want a single "vertical" for this coverage. They experience mental health and well-being as a lens that touches every aspect of their lives and the world.
- When recruiting and supporting youth content creators, engage diverse voices, especially young people who are BIPOC, LGBTQ+, system-engaged, and in other ways underserved and misrepresented in mainstream coverage and mental health services. Tune into what they're saying on social and cultivate the deeper story behind the posts, cast a wide net for contributors, listen to and learn from your writers, respect and compensate them, and consult them on adjacent decisions (such as images and other assets).
- Adults supporting young people to tell their mental health stories need to prepare them for the "digital afterlife" post-publication. Best practices include understanding their thought processes on what to disclose, reinforcing that no one is entitled to their story, ensuring they've had the necessary conversations with loved ones and support providers, working through scenarios about how their stories might be received, and identifying strategies for allowing them maximum agency in shaping their present and future narratives.
- While youth audiences appreciate heart-felt and hard-hitting angles, these types of stories should also link to practical tools, tips and resources, so young people know where they can turn if they are having a hard time or want to do more to help others.
- Producing mental health and well-being content with young creators requires a humanizing, holistic, and collaborative approach that goes beyond standard journalism workflows. Editors need to work hand-in-hand with reporters, valuing their voices and engaging in a way that honors who they are as people beyond the story.
- Finally, a healing-centered approach to mental health and well-being reporting with youth means building joy and hope into the process.