

BEHIND THE SCENES INTERVIEW: Shattering the Stigma

1) What is your organization and why and how did you start it?

My organization is Shattering The Stigma. In TV, books, and movies, we often see portrayals of mental health incorporated into the storyline. Characters grasp and deal with situations and problems that also appear in real life. These portrayals, often are what give many viewers their understanding and insight of how mental health affects a person and the people around them. However, unfortunately too often, media portrayals can be unrealistic and overly-dramatized to gauge a larger audience. These topics get used as a platform to enhance the storyline instead of being used to inform and educate people. Viewers and readers walk away with misconceptions and incorrect assumptions, which only exaggerates the mental health stigma. The entertainment industry truly has the potential to be a great platform to foster understanding and help to shatter the stigma around mental health, but too many times, this potential and platform are not utilized. After noticing it in myself how misinformed I was, I decided to start a blog that helps separate fact from fiction. With a team of other students who are passionate about mental health, we hope to help people understand that the depictions portrayed on the media are not always accurate and hope to give people a better understanding.

2) What good experiences have you had so far with your organization?

I have many fond memories with my team. I really love their passion and dedication. Originally, this project was just me posting about the mental health depictions I had seen. But earlier this year, I decided to invite other students to collaborate and post on the blog as well. I figured that having more students to write it would mean that we could cover more varieties of media and reach out to an even larger audience. Recruitment definitely took me a while (I think I contacted at least 50 school clubs), but eventually, a great team of passionate individuals was created.

Working with these students has been amazing. We all come from all over the nation and each person brings a unique viewpoint to the table. I love when we bounce ideas. It really shows our diversity. I also love the support system that we have. When someone's piece gets posted, we all celebrate and congratulate the person.

3) How do you feel your organization has made an impact or will make an impact on the world?

On our blog, our readers are able to leave comments. I always love reading the comments because it shows the impact that it's making on people. The purpose of our blog is to inform people about mental health and illnesses. By having people read and interact with our pieces, it really reaffirms our purpose, which excites and ignites our passions even more. Hopefully, in the future, even more, people will read our blog. Our goal is to reach out to as many people as possible. I really hope that people walk away with a deeper understanding of mental health and that we've helped to shatter the stigma. :)

4) How and why did you choose mental health as the focus for your organization?

Mental health is an everyday part of our lives. It's something that affects us all. Unfortunately, mental health has a stigma around it. Misinformation and misconceptions only feed this stigma further. This prevents people from speaking out and getting the help that they need. The consequences of this can be catastrophic and have too often ended with lives lost. To help erase this stigma, it's important that we provide people with facts and the truth. It's definitely an uphill battle, but every little effort helps to make a difference.

5) Why is mental health awareness important to you?

Similar to what I said before, mental health is something that affects us all. There are so many people who are afraid to ask for help. In fact, for many people conversations about mental health can feel uncomfortable. This is why it's so important to bring these conversations to the table. Speaking out is powerful. When we discuss this, it helps to show others that they are not alone. When we give people more information about the media portrayals of mental health, we help shed more light on these topics. With more mental health awareness, we can truly help to save lives. I believe that every effort has an impact and that it truly is important that we do everything that we can to inform the public with facts and spread the truth about mental health.

6) What makes Shattering the Stigma unique?

Shattering the stigma is a student-run project. We focus on media depictions of mental health and conditions. Our goal is to give people more information about these conditions so that they are better informed and have a better understanding. We also invite students to share their mental health journeys on our site. This is to inspire other students and remind them that they are not alone.

7) What is your plan for the future to grow your organization?

We have many goals and milestones that we aim to achieve in the future. We plan on doing more campaigns and contacting organizations for collaborations. We are also working on redesigning our website.

8) What are you most excited about for the future?

We have a great team of individuals. I'm excited to see where this project goes. In the past few months, it truly has transformed and I'm proud of our progress.

9) For fun: If you had the world's attention for 30 seconds, what would you say?

This is a great question!

I would use those 30 seconds to remind the world that we are all humans. I think that sometimes we can get so caught up in our biases, that we can forget our humanity. With there being so much hate and violence out in the world, I think that we all should remember that we are all human beings. We all have feelings, we all get hurt, we are all people. No one deserves hate or violence. Everyone deserves love and happiness and that is what we should aim to give to others.