



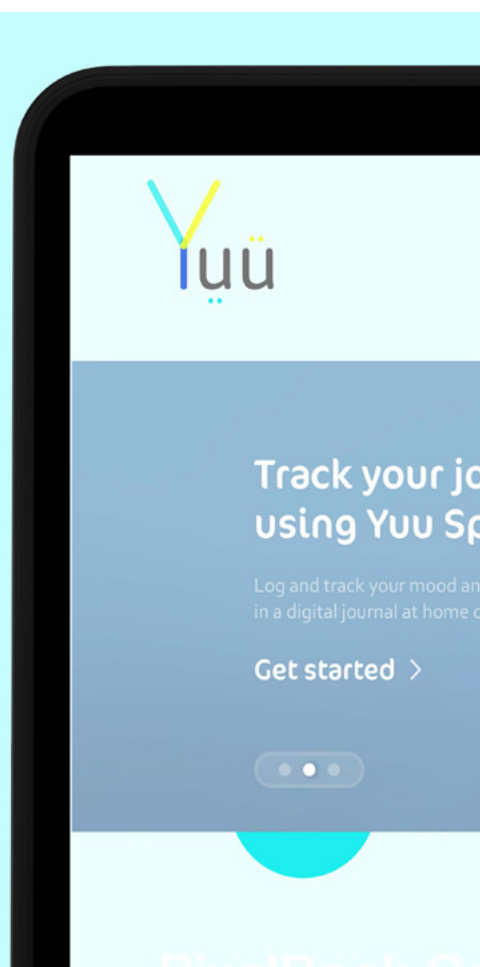
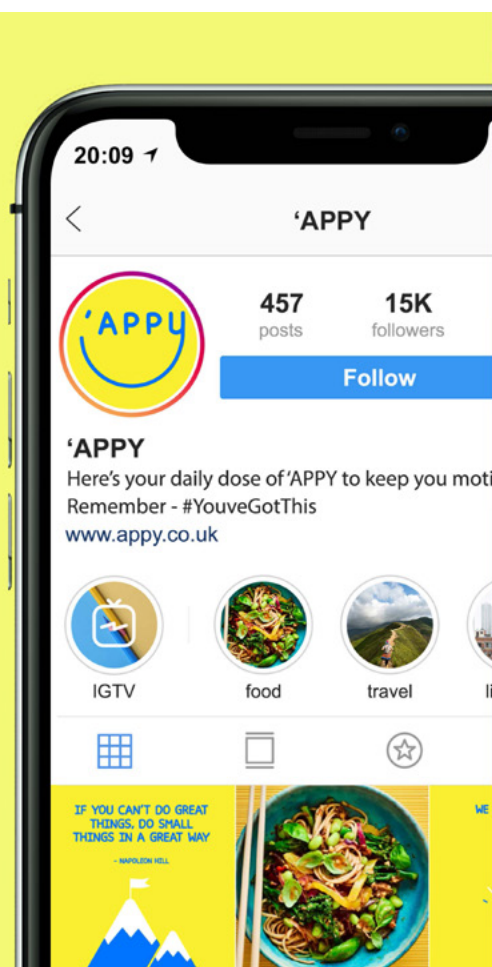
The Research & Thinking Behind  
the Joy in Numbers Project

Given the nature of my past projects, I knew from the beginning that my project was going to revolve around creating a positive impact on a person's mental health in one way or another. However, rather than looking into specific tools or projects like I had done previously, I decided to take a step back and look at the counterpart of the upsetting and negative feelings that come with mental illness – joy. By doing so, the question arose;

*How can I use joy as a tool to counteract feelings of negativity and improve people's every day experiences and overall mental health?*

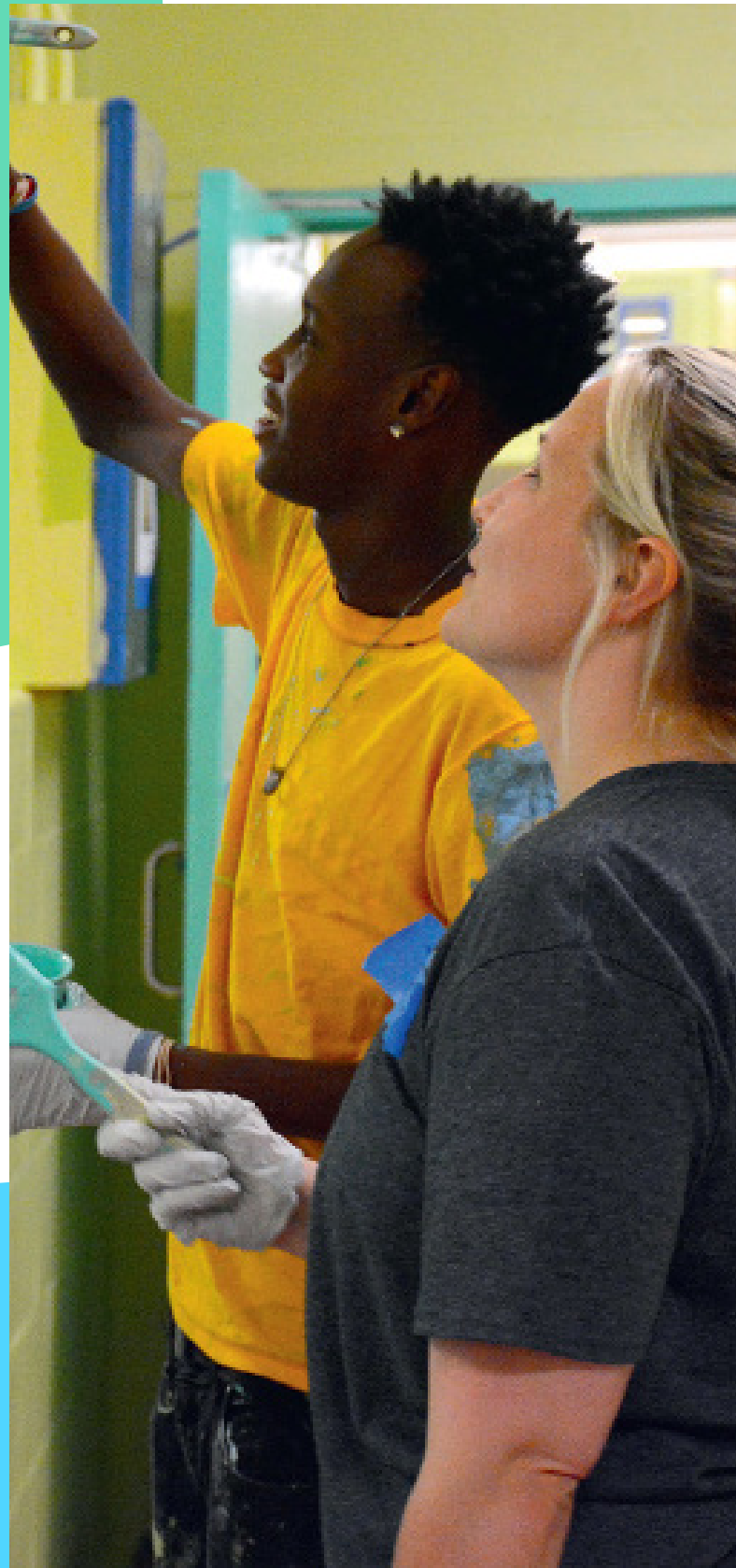
I began thinking about the journeys that most people take each day, which led to me to focus on several main areas; public spaces and commutes, visual and physical stimulations, internal and external expectations and lastly, our relationship with technology.

Starting with public spaces and commutes, I found a report (RSPH, 2020) done by the Royal Society for Public Health that found that levels of happiness and satisfaction were lower for people who had longer commutes. Within their report they stated "Research indicates that commuting can reduce mental wellbeing, negatively impact physical health such as raising blood pressure and also, reduce the time available for health promoting activities, such as physical activity" (RSPH, 2020). When trying to understand the link between daily commutes and the negative effects this can have on our health and mental wellbeing, the report suggested "crowding, perceived lack of control and unpredictability are all major factors." All three factors of which can also be found within public spaces.





However, taking this into consideration there is one more factor that I would like to bring forward, and that is the aesthetics of our public transport system and general urban environments. In previous projects I have researched into how shapes and colours effect how we perceive our environments and outlined the subconscious effects that these can have on our wellbeing and actions. Publicolor is a stay-in-school youth development program that engages high-risk students in their educations through the use of colour. Simply by adding a feeling of warmth and play into the school grounds using colour, they managed to increase the high school graduations rate from 64% to 100% between the years 2018-2019 (Puplicolor, 2019). Delux's Let's Colour project demonstrates the power that colour plays on our behaviors and moods through a series of social experiments, revealing that we can inspire people to be more social, active and playful just by adding colour into our environments (Let's Colour, 2019). Designers Arakawa and Gins took similar theories onto a whole new level by designing an apartment complex in Tokyo that would 'reverse ageing'.





Through colour and structural design, they created a series of apartments that forced the body to work as you moved around it. Mrs. Gins elaborated on how this concept could also have physical benefits on the body "Its architecture makes people use their bodies in unexpected ways to maintain equilibrium, and that, she said, will stimulate their immune systems." (Bernstein, 2020). With all this evidence gathered I believe it is explicit just how much the aesthetics of our environments have an impact on our overall wellbeing. This added into the previous suggestion of crowding, perceived lack of control and unpredictability playing a part in our heightened stress and anxiety levels all make a cause for concern for those currently living within urban environments.

*So what can we do to combat these stressful factors and boost the feeling of joy and happiness?*



To begin understanding the concept of what joy 'is' and how we can go about achieving it, I wanted to find out what brought others the feeling of joy. Gaining this type of information first-hand would allow me the opportunity to directly embed the communities voices within the project, whilst simultaneously ensuring that my project remains open and covers joy from all perspectives. Using Survey Monkey, I created a one-question questionnaire asking people to describe what brought them joy. I kept the question as broad as possible to encourage people to answer freely, without worrying too much about how it was going to be perceived. I also ensured that all submissions were anonymous and that the text box remained limitless so the person answering could share as little or as much as they wanted to.

The survey was distributed through my personal social media platforms as well as emails. Based on how the survey was distributed, I can assume that the majority of respondents from this questionnaire will have been based between the Skipton

and Leeds areas. I managed to gather 71 responses, all of which were extremely insightful and allowed me to understand how joy is perceived and spread to others in a much broader sense.

Simply reading through the responses gathered was enough to fill me with joy, for example:

*"When people feel like home. Not just partners when you're with friends too and everything feels right"*

# What brings you joy?

joy in numbers

## Your Joy

For my final MA project I'm focusing on ways that I can use design to bring **joy** into peoples everyday lives. By filling out this one question survey, you're being a **HUGE** help and I want you to know I really appreciate it. The submissions will be used to develop my project, all responses are kept anonymous.

You can describe a sound, a memory, a colour or even a person that has previously, or continues to bring you joy. It doesn't just have to be one thing either, please feel free to write a list!

To make it even, I'll start by sharing one of **my** joyful things - I love to watch my cats play with a piece of string. They just go crazy for it, it's great.

## So, What Brings You Joy?

## So, What Brings You Joy?

Answered: 71 Skipped: 0

RESPONSES (71)

WORD CLOUD

TAGS (0)

Sentiments: OFF

☐

Apply to selected ▼

Filter by tag ▼

Search responses



Showing 71 responses

☐

Watching spring lambs playing chase in the fields, The smell of fresh cut grass along the towpath, Living so close to the water, the wildlife and the change of the seasons.

6/21/2020 1:04 PM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags ▼](#)

☐

Nature

6/8/2020 10:46 PM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags ▼](#)

☐

Helping others, dancing, bright colours, textures and craftsmanship, smiles, self expression, nature, birds, sun, blue skies

5/5/2020 3:21 PM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags ▼](#)

☐

- observing random acts of kindness - fluffy animals - laughing with my closest friends - music that makes you feel something - blue sky and sunshine - castles - sweet scented candles - going to the gym - helping others - having a clean, organised, calm environment - being outside and appreciating the beauty of nature

2/27/2020 9:37 PM

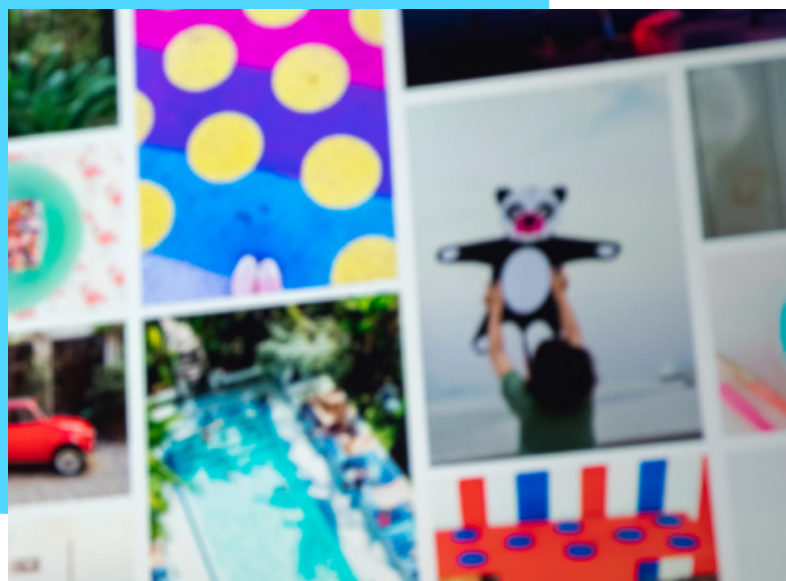
[View respondent's answers](#)

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This questionnaire led to the awakening of two discoveries surrounding joy; there is a direct link between a sense of joy and being amongst the people you love and that joy is a feeling that can travel through a description alone.

As I was reading through the responses gathered, I couldn't help but smile – sometimes this was because someone had written about a moment that I had experienced for myself, for example the 'smell of grass,' allowing me to imagine and capture the feel and smell. Other times it was simply from picturing these joyful moments that had been captured and described to me. Knowing that something has brought another person a sense of joy is enough to feel it for yourself. Having come across Ingrid Fetell Lee's TED talk, I learnt that the responses that I had received tied in with the patterns Ingrid found amongst her 'objects of joy' project. In her TED talk, she listed that she saw a reoccurring pattern within the follow themes; "round things, pops of bright colour, symmetrical shapes, a sense of abundance and multiplicity and a feeling of lightness or elevation" (Lee, Ingrid Fetell, 2020).



However, these themes primarily covered what Ingrid had noticed amongst tangible objects rather than real life moments – so not all of the themes were directly applicable. Other areas left to explore were what it is about experiences involving nature and human connectivity that provide us this feeling of joy.

Contrarily, you could connect the theme of abundance to human connectivity, however that isn't always the case. What about those one-on-one moments you share laughing with a friend or hugging someone that you hadn't seen in too long? Kira M. Newman wrote an article summarizing the studies that had been done on the correlation between social connection and happiness. She stated, "What seems true across cultures is

that social connections are key to well-being. For example, very happy people are highly social and tend to have strong relationships; kids with a richer network of connections grow up to be happier adults; and socializing is one of the most positive everyday activities." (Newman, 2020). From this I can conclude that there is unarguable evidence that people receive huge amounts of psychological benefit through having a connection with others. No matter how big or small the interaction may be.

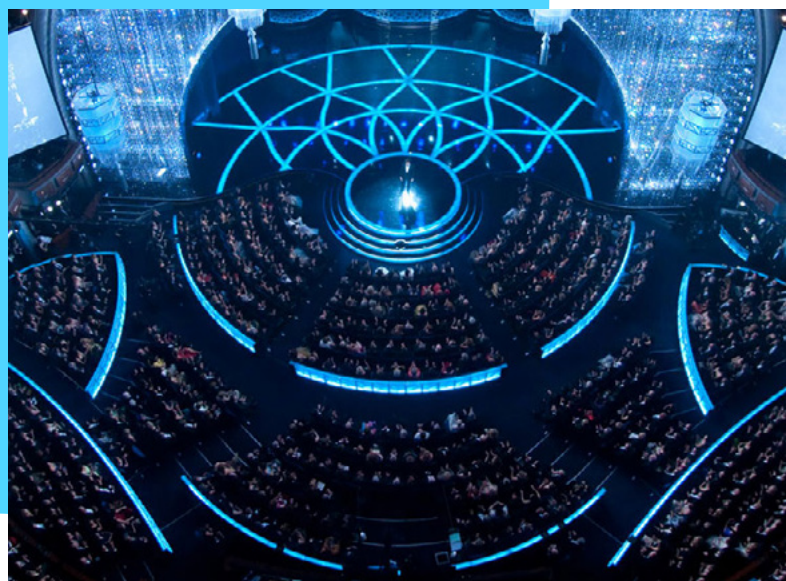






Ingrid Fetell Lee elaborated further on her findings of what provokes the feeling joy in her book, *Joyful*. She broke down what she calls the 'aesthetics of joy' into multiple sections; energy, abundance, freedom, harmony, play, surprise, transcendence, magic, celebration and renewal. Within the Freedom section of her book, Ingrid goes on to reveal her findings on the connection between the outdoors, the feeling of freedom and joy. She states, "Suddenly I understood why we feel free even in a tiny garden or greenhouse. Indoors, the thick, insulated walls and HVAC systems remove the gentle fluctuations of temperature, scent, air and humidity that make being outdoors such a delight. Being in nature liberates our senses." (Lee, 2020). Within this section, she also shares some of the findings she had on the psychological benefits found from people living within greener environments – Large-scale studies conducted across the United States, Britain and the Netherlands show that there are lower cases of anxiety and depression than those in less green areas. She adds that one suggestive reasoning for this is that spending time within nature decreases blood flow to a part of the brain called the subgenual pre-frontal cortex, a part of the brain that is thought to prolong overthinking.

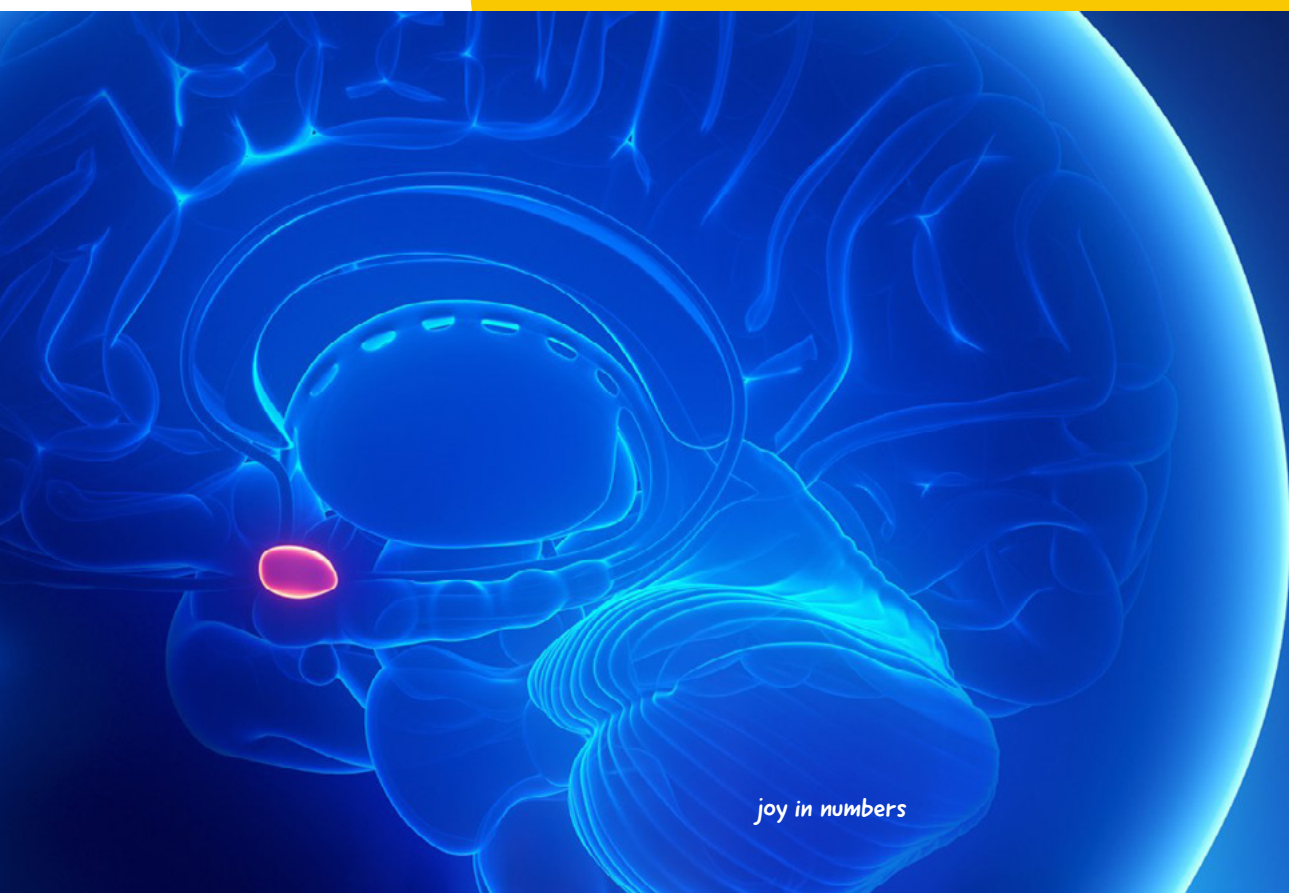
She then went on to the research she had discovered surrounding community and group gatherings in her Celebration section. Following on from David Rockwell's architectural work at the Oscars (Rockwell Group, 2020), Ingrid concluded that "Emotions are naturally contagious, and joy especially so. We 'catch' it from one another through facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures" (Lee, 2020). Made for Joy, a community group, are taking these connotations of community curated joy and making them into a reality through their meet-up events. On the topic of how we can understand our joy, they wrote "We can experience true joy through sharing our journey with others. The key to this is accepting that Joy is fundamentally both a choice and a way of life. Because when we live life understanding Joy is a choice and a way to live, we have the capacity to experience Joy in any moment." (Made for Joy, 2020). From these findings, it is clear that we will always naturally gravitate towards social interaction. This is a trait that may have originated from the time that we needed to rely on groups and communities to survive. From this conclusion I began to question how we practice community giving and sharing today, and whether the subtle reliance of technology is beginning to negatively impact this.



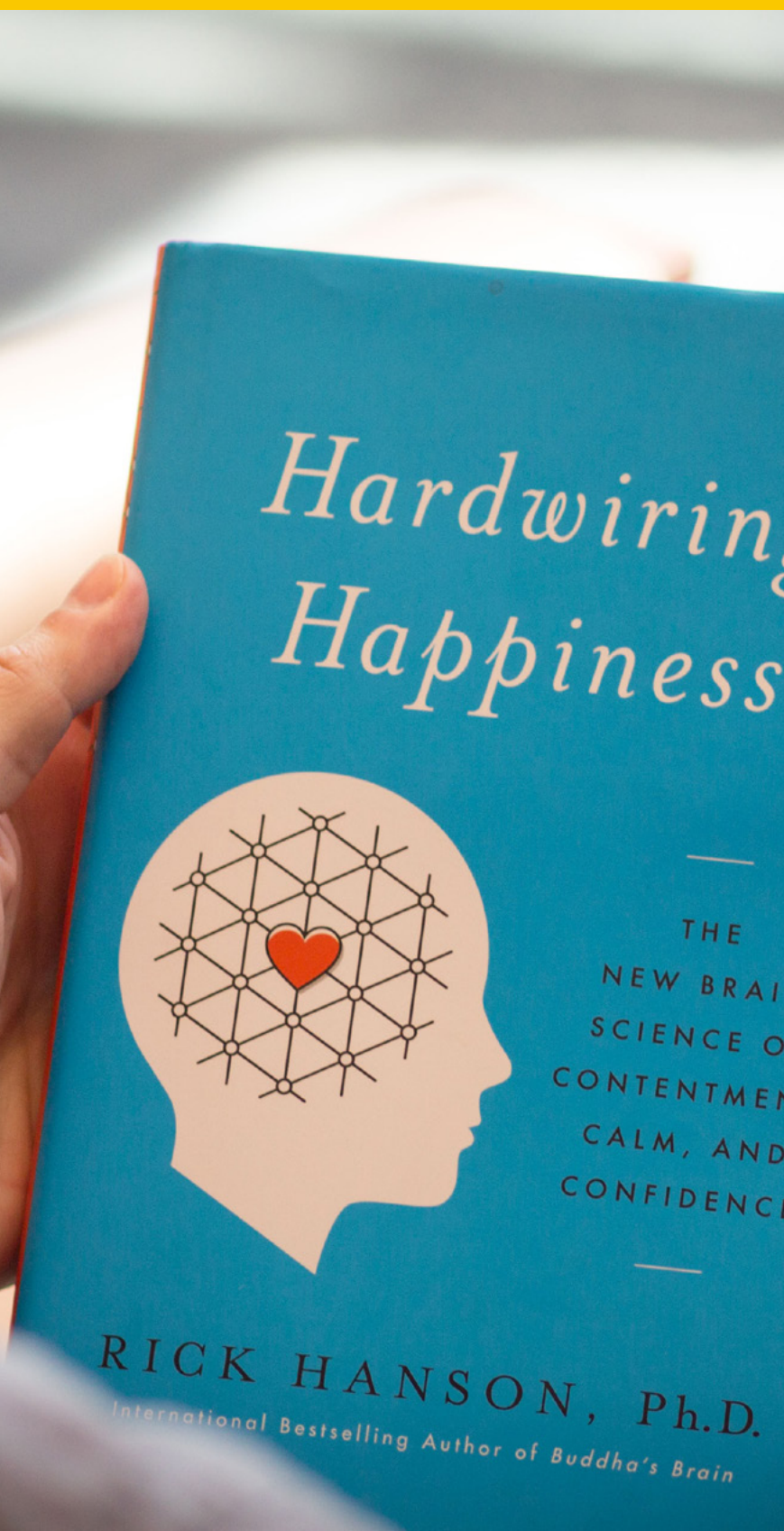


It's no secret that as a society we're beginning to bring technology into every aspect of our lives. Job roles that once required a person to function are being replaced with artificial intelligence and similarly, you can always count on there being an app available that replaces the need for tangible tools. Although this can be extremely convenient and, in some cases, both more environmentally and economically friendly than traditional methods, it is coming at a cost of negative psychological and physical impacts. According to The Vision Council "Many individuals suffer from physical eye discomfort after screen use for longer than two hours at a time." (The Vision Council, 2020), and after a survey they found that Americans reported around 27.7% of them were experiencing headaches after using a digital device. There are also claims that social media is triggering the ancient fear of missing out (FOMO), making us more attached to our devices than ever.

Anita Sanz wrote "The fear of missing out is an old—actually an ancient—fear, being triggered by the newest form of communication: social media. Our survival as an individual within a tribe, and thus our survival as a species, once hinged on our being aware of threats both to ourselves and to the larger group. To be "in the know" when we roamed around in small groups was critical to survival." (Sanz, 2020). Curious to where this feeling is generated within our brain, I began to look into the brain's limbic system, an area that is known for processing emotions, memories and arousal. I found that the feeling of FOMO is in fact generated by the Amygdala, an area of the brain's limbic system, that also is used to detect whether something could be a potential threat to our survival. On the other hand, the Amygdala functionality is also being linked to the processing of positive stimuli, emotional memories and even socially interactive behaviours (Neuroscientifically Challenged, 2020).







Continuing on this path, I delved into learning about which parts of the brain effect our emotions. By exploring the functionality of joy at its' very core, perhaps I could understand how to trigger it directly. I came across the research of Rick Hanson, PhD, a neuropsychologist and author of, *Hardwiring Happiness*, a book on "how to reshape your brain and your life". On his website, he wrote about how we could train our brain into taking in the good – "There are two kinds of memory: Explicit and Implicit. Explicit: Recollections of specific events. Implicit: Emotions, body sensations, relationship paradigms, sense of the world. Implicit memory is different from remembering ideas or concepts: this kind of memory is in your "gut." It's visceral, felt, powerful, and rooted in the fundamental and ancient – reptile and early mammal – structures of your brain" (Hanson, *Train Your Brain: Takin in the Good - Key Points*, 2020). This tells me that explicit memory is more factually based, focusing on past situations and experiences, whereas the implicit memory deals with the ever changing 'now', the emotional and 'soulful' side of the mind. Therefore, in order to evoke joy, it will be the Implicit memory that I will need to target.

Rick also went on to speak about the Amygdala's functionality, "The amygdala – the switchboard that assigns a feeling tone to the stimuli flowing through the brain (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral) and directs a response (approach, avoid, move on) – is neurologically primed to label experiences as frightening and negative. In other words, it's built to look for the bad." (Hanson, Seven Facts about the Brain That Incline the Mind to Joy, 2020). If negative experiences overshadow positive ones I wanted to know; to what scale? This would help me form a system that could help put the positive experiences back on top.

According to Hanson, "Negative experiences trump positive ones: A single bad event with a dog is more memorable than a 1,000 good times." And, for positive experiences to be registered at all they typically have to be held in awareness for 5-20 seconds. From this information, I concluded that for joy to be easily accepted and recognised within people's everyday lives, I'm going to have to embed a level of repetition into my project. This repetition will help me build up the positive experiences until they are easily registered into the mind, allowing the feeling of joy to have longer lasting effects on the mind.

**"That's a deeply  
wise and wonderful  
undertaking: happiness  
is skillful means. And  
happily for happiness,  
this is aligned with your  
deepest nature: awake,  
interested, benign,  
at peace, and quietly  
inclined to joy"**

(Hanson, Seven Facts about the Brain  
That Incline the Mind to Joy, 2020)






I began to explore different directions that I could take this project based on my findings. After having discovered that joy can be spread through words and phrases alone, I experimented with typographic designs that displayed the raw, uncut submissions that I had gathered through my questionnaire on a striking, colourful background. These were designed with the intention to be displayed throughout urban areas, be that through large billboards, posters at the train station or small stickers on rubbish bins.

Keeping the design simple was pivotal to the functionality of these as according to the Urban Design for Mental Health

organisation, one of the key factors to people that live within urban environments having increased mental health issues is an overload of the senses (UDMH, 2020). Although I did find these to be somewhat effective, I felt like there was still something missing. As you still had to work to experience the joyful moments that they were capturing, it opened up the risk of people simply walking past them.



**The gradual  
heaviness of  
my daughter  
breastfeeding  
to sleep in  
my arms.**



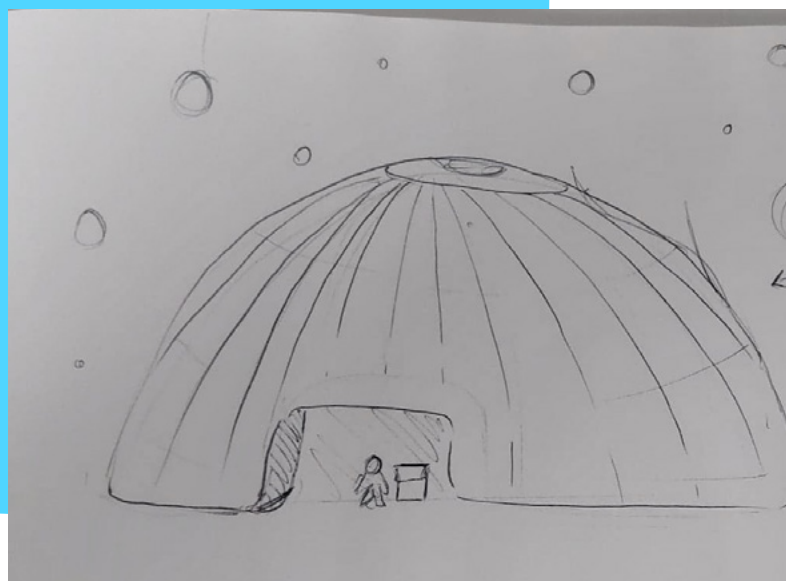


Seeing  
strangers  
make the train  
when they've  
ran for it

#CAPTURINGJOY

To try and minimise this risk, I developed a concept to design and create a joyful space instead. Having a physical space would almost force the audience to interact and pay attention, increasing the chances of them experiencing the positive effects. I began forming the designs to create a space that would project the captured moments of joy within itself (similar to a planetarium). Using a variation of type, video and imagery this space would encapsulate the moments of joy that I had gathered, as well as open up the opportunity for more people to submit their own. Having an entire space that people could enter, dedicated to bringing joy, opened up the possibilities of stimulating other senses too, such as sound and smell. For example;

*Imagine walking into a space that smelt like freshly baked bread, now wouldn't that be amazing?*





Thinking back to an iridescent maze I saw in the Leeds Train Station back in 2018, I began to remember how the colours, form and positioning of it enticed you into interacting with it. I remember feeling free as I let my inner child explore the maze, interacting with the design and feeling completely joyous in that moment. Although I couldn't find out the actual intent behind Brut Deluxe's design (Brut Deluxe, 2018), I know that it brought me joy and this was the exact type of feeling I would want to embed within my project. It was during this concept development that the coronavirus pandemic became global, causing the country to go into lockdown to prevent further spreading of the virus and decrease the amount infected.





Due to lockdown restrictions and safety precautions, the possibility of creating a physical space was completely eliminated. However, the need for my project became more transparent than ever before. Due to the widespread concern, fear and stress that is being caused by the pandemic, mental health issues and symptoms are on the rise. An article from the QJM states "One study of 1210 respondents from 194 cities in China in January and February 2020 found that 54% of respondents rated the psychological impact of the Covid-19 outbreak as moderate or severe; 29% reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms; and 17% reported moderate to

severe depressive symptoms." (W Cullen, 2020). They also went onto hypothesize further psychological impacts from the pandemic, one of which stating that they anticipate an increase in new cases of people experiencing anxiety and depressive symptoms with some experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder in due course.



Although these statistics and assumptions are intimidating and a great cause for concern, I have forced myself to pay attention to the good that has also come from this pandemic. Pollution is being cut on a global scale, according to IS Global “ambient levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>)—one of the main traffic-related pollutants in our cities— have declined by between 70% and 80% in Barcelona since 21 March” (Querol, 2020). Wildlife is thriving in their newfound freedom, exploring cities, visiting housing estates and walking into towns in search for food (BBC, 2020). And most importantly, communities are coming together to support each other in this crucial time.

We’ve had celebrities such as Joe Wicks put on daily PE lessons for families to do with their children (YouTube, 2020), new social media platforms dedicated to bringing fun to people within isolation have emerged (Isolation Fun, 2020), and creatives have begun creating ‘DIY’ colouring and craft packs for people to download and do at home (Turner, 2020). All of which have been made accessible to the public, completely free of charge.

**These small acts of kindness and humanity weren’t just giving us all something to do, they were helping us stay connected.**







I had the chance to speak with Harriet Ferguson, a Senior Designer from Pearlfisher, after presenting my project outline and we began to discuss the possibility of spreading joy through a series of postcards (similar to what Mr.Bingo had done previously during his hate mail project (Bingo, n.d.)). Although this was similar to my previous billboard concept, I decided it was a concept worth exploring given that the risks of them being ignored were close to none. Using the same submissions I had gathered through my 'what brings you joy' questionnaire, I went on to create a few examples of the postcards, except this time, I kept it very 'home made' by hand drawing both the visual and written elements.

Although this did add some humanity to the project, the impact of the outcomes simply wasn't strong enough to stand alone. Dr Lucy Atcheson, a counselling psychologist, said "we start to miss 'micro-lifts' during this isolation period - which are the small things that subconsciously have added to our day" (Quarter, 2020). She also stated that these usually have to be something that brings us a sense of achievement (Gallagher, 2020). With that in mind, one could argue that the postcard concept would be acting as 'micro-lift', however it has already been implied by Dr Atcheson that we would need to experience these multiples times day in order to feel a conscious effect from them. It was at this point that I turned my attention to creating a public space or a platform that could be used to host and display different forms of 'multi-lifts'.



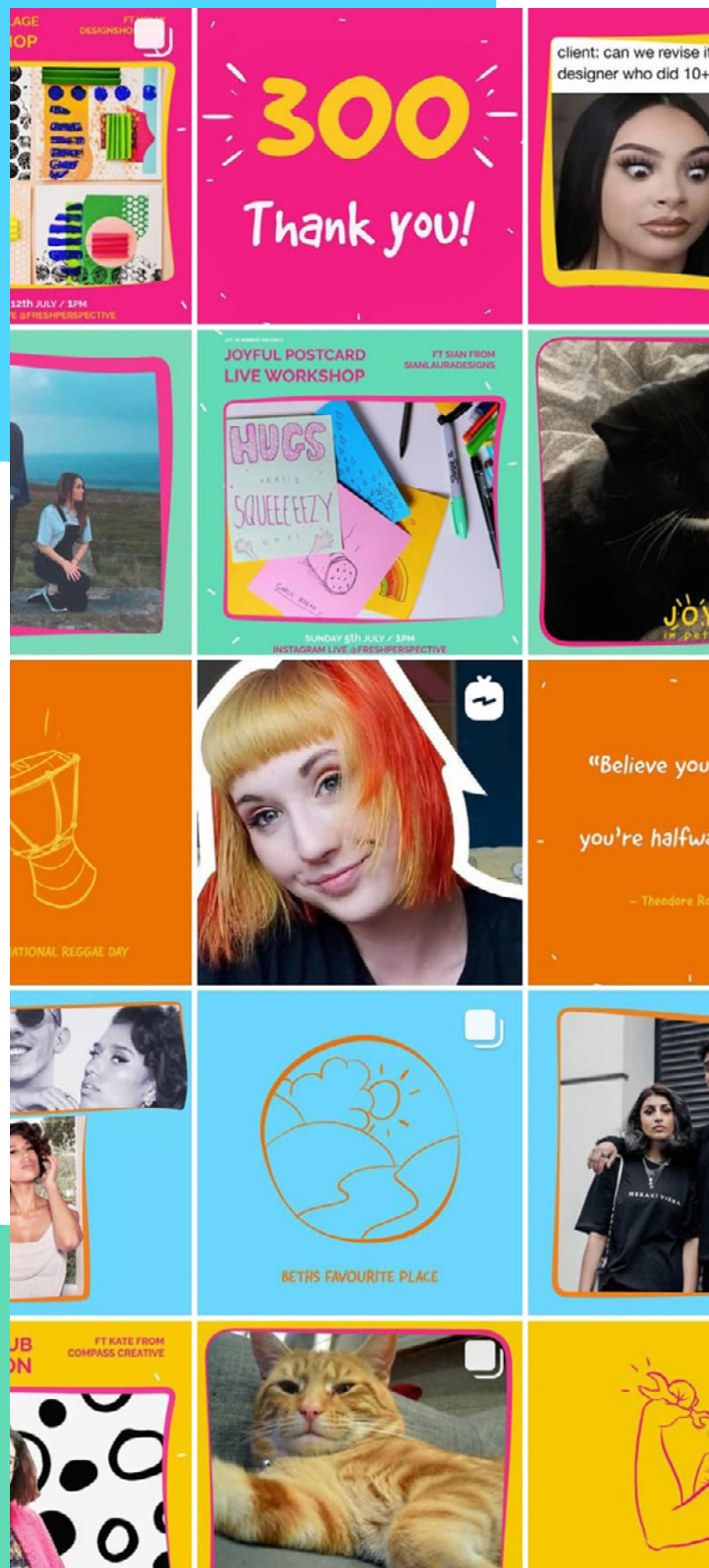
I now knew that joy flourished in situations within the following themes; connection, achievement, community, play and repetition. From a series of experiments surrounding these areas arose the concept of hosting a series of live workshop and tutorials co-hosted by local talents. By creating an adaptive and welcoming space for local talents to showcase their talents with the public, I was able to create a win-win situation. Whilst the general public would be granted the opportunity to learn and experience new crafts, local creatives and businesses would be able market their products and/or services to a new audience. All within a community focused, joyful environment. Due to my research findings, I was hesitant to incorporate the use of technology within my project.

However, under the circumstances, social media was the optimal platform I could use to be able to reach out to people during the lockdown. Nevertheless, I have designed this project in hopes that it will outlive the pandemic and once it's safe to do so, it shall later evolve to be able to bring workshops within a physical space too. The great Martin Luther King Jr. once stated "There is power in numbers and there is power in unity" during one of his legendary civil rights movements. Seeing as this project captures the very essence of bringing people together to create a positive impact, it only seemed natural to incorporate part of this quote within the branding. From this rose the title: 'Joy in Numbers.'

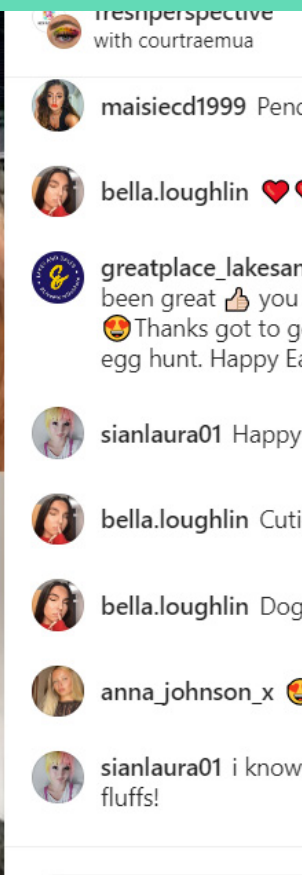




During this time, I was approached by, Fresh Perspective (FP), a group I had previously collaborated with, as their current projects had been placed on hold due to the Covid-19 restrictions. This group was originally put in place by the Great Place: Lakes & Dales project (Great Place: Lakes & Dales, 2020) to find different methods that they could use to represent the younger voices in and around the Skipton area. I proposed that we began to collaborate on the Joy in Numbers project as it allowed FP to continue working on a project that they believed in whilst I was given the opportunity to embed my project onto an established social media platform. According to Mohsin, Instagram can generate up to 4x more interactions in comparison to Facebook and 71% of Instagram's users were under the age of 35. (Mohsin, 2020). Based on these findings, I decided that it would be best to host the Joy in Numbers workshops solely on the FP Instagram for now and use the other social media platforms as a resource for marketing.







Our first live session was a makeup tutorial on April 12th, led by Courtney from CourtRae MUA and co-hosting by Beth from FP. Having a member of FP co-host the session alongside the creative lead allowed for a natural flow of conversation, creating an inviting and laid back atmosphere. As this added an additional sense of community spirit, I proposed that we continued this process in our future live sessions. Apart from one technical hiccup at the beginning, the live tutorial went exceedingly well. We had people that had tuned in at home sending in photos showing their progress afterwards and it was delightful to see that there were some household group photos amongst them. Not only was the project managing to get people together in a virtual space, but a physical one too. Since then, we continued to book in a variety of individual creatives to lead online workshops such as; singers, bakers, circus performers and even paper makers. Each host brought a new lease of life into the project, engaging with the audience as well as us to ensure that everyone felt included and heard.

JOIN US ON INSTAGRAM LIVE  
@FRESHPERSPECTIVE FOR

**COURT  
RAE  
MUA**

LIVE MAKEUP TUTORIAL

SUNDAY 12TH APRIL | 1PM - 2PM

TUNE IN AND FOLLOW ALONG WITH COURTNEY AS  
SHE GIVES A STEP BY STEP MAKEUP TUTORIAL LIVE

I then began looking into different methods which I could use to measure the effects it was having on the participants. During my research I came across 'Joy Monitor' by The Joy Principle (Principle, 2020). This online survey aims to measure a person's current level of joy based on the amount of time spent engaging with family, friends, giving to the world or materialistic possessions.

This aligns with the research I had previously conducted that concluded that there were several main themes that surrounded joy. By adapting this concept to

fit within the themes of joy that I'm basing my project around (community, connection, achievement and play), it could be used to measure whether or not joy was being generated through engagement with the project. Contrarily, there is the concept that happiness, and thus joy, is subjective. What brings one person joy may not necessarily have the same affect on another, therefore, how can anyone hope to measure this accurately?

# How much Joy is in your life?

CHECK



*joy in numbers*

The Joy Principle



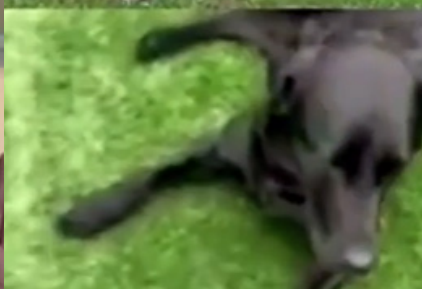
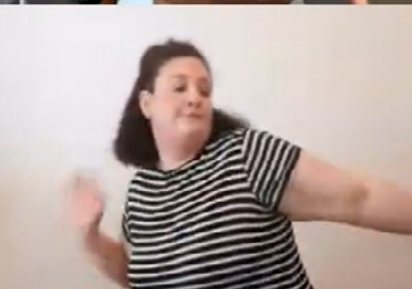
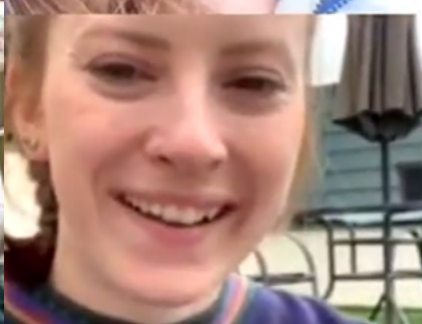
On a similar note, Madora Soutter, argues that even if we are able to measure such things as happiness, joy, or empathy – should we? Within her article, discussing the social and emotional learning measurement system in schools, she says: “Is measuring something as crucial – and as beautiful – as empathy really a good idea? Or is it so reductionist that it threatens the authenticity and joy of being in a classroom where these qualities are nourished?” (Soutter, 2020). She later adds that measuring character, social-emotional learning, and similar outcomes might completely detract from the actual purpose of promoting them. This got me thinking – if I was to generate some kind of survey to distribute out to the workshop participants, would I be creating some kind of pressure for them to of enjoyed what they had done? Not only would this take away from the authenticity of the survey results, but it could potentially diminish the positive impacts of the workshops. It’s for this reason that I decided to disregard the need for official measurement systems. Rather than try to objectify and measure something as subjective as joy, I’ve instead created an opportune space in which joyful experiences can flourish. The impacts of which can be understood through observation and casual engagement with the participants (such as asking them what type of workshop they would like to try next).



In summary, using the intel gathered through a combination of both primary and secondary research, I was able to establish an online space and brand that promotes active engagement in joyful activities on a reoccurring basis. Although it's hard to know how much joy the project has brought overall, through participant observation it is abundantly clear that this project has and will continue to create an opportunity for joy consecutively.







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