Student Name: Ryan Marwood

Student Number: 2207184

Project Report:

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

**Abstract**

For this project, I have decided to create a website and an accompanying literature review into the effects of mental health and useful resources as to how better to manage or improve it. This topic is important for a lot of people as the problem is widespread, but especially for me due to my own past experiences struggling with it, and I’d like to provide a way for others to access information that had helped me at a point in my past. With an alarming number of students reporting to have been diagnosed, or currently suffering from mental health issues (For students, the number is allegedly as high as Seven in every Ten students, according to a report from the organisation ‘[Randstad](https://www.randstad.co.uk/student-mental-health-report-2022/)’ in 2022.) (Uk, n.d.-b), it’s becoming more and more evident that greater support needs to be offered to people in order to treat the problems causing this.

The website aims to provide information towards the effects of mental health and gives useful tips and advice on ways a person can better manage their mental well-being, offering guidance on a variety of topics related to health, including things such as exercise, nutrition, meditation and many more. Whilst this has been done many times by many different organisations at a higher standard, due to my own personal experiences handling it I thought it would be cathartic and possibly even relatable to others to give my own spin on it.

**Project Plan:**

Initially, I spent a lot of time pondering about what the topic of this project would be. I cycled through ideas in my head thinking of what would be the ‘coolest’ and ‘most fun’ idea I could bring to life; I soon realised this was the wrong way of thinking, and decided to go with something I felt a more personal connection to and had a greater passion for. This was true for both the topic of the project and the format in which I brought it to fruition.

When planning the project, I decided the best way to convey the information I wanted to highlight would be in a website format; I chose this format due to my previous experience in web design, specifically in the HTML and CSS languages. However, in this project, I chose to learn and add a small amount of JavaScript functionality, which was a completely new language for me. I quickly discovered though, thanks to the basic Python I’ve learnt through my first year of university, that JavaScript works quite similarly to the Python coding language; this allowed me to adapt rather quickly to implementing JavaScript into the project.

Originally, I had planned to include a few more pages, but after writing them and creating the content I found the content was spread too thinly between pages; because of this I made the decision to cut down from five pages to four. Whilst four pages seems perhaps a little on the small side, I believe for the sake of accessibility and displaying the content in a well-presented manner it was the correct choice.

**Design**

The website has been designed in mind with having a bright, vibrant look that aims to be calming to view; due to the subject matter, it seemed appropriate to layout the content and information contained in the site into a short-form factor, with the content being delivered in smaller ‘packets’ rather than sprawling blocks of text which can be off-putting and hard to read, essentially highlighting the important details the site is attempting to convey without needing the user to read through large volumes of text.

During the planning stages of the accompanying website, I had initially planned to use a standard website design framework using multiple HTML files, one for each individual page; however, after learning some basic JavaScript, I decided to adopt a different approach and instead design the page using only a single HTML file. This design allows for a user to download only one HTML file rather than several, saving bandwidth and reducing loading times for the user. This was achieved by writing each individual pages code in one single HTML file, then containing each page in its own ‘div’, and finally through the use of JavaScript setting the style of any page not currently being accessed (Via clicking the relevant navigation option at the top of the page.) to have a display value of ‘none’, which is changed to the ‘block’ value upon accessing the page.

A picture containing text, font, screenshot, line

Description automatically generated

Here we can see the JavaScript code that checks if a div with a specific ID has the display value of ‘none’, and if so, it changes the value to ‘block’.

The one constant I chose to keep consistent across the site was the use of a Banner at the head of the page, this primarily stays unchanged, minus the image in the banner and the heading changing. This was done to ensure there is an over-arching theme of the site and aims to alleviate any confusion the user would have if a large majority of the layout on the page was to change, especially without any reloading necessary due to the JavaScript design of the site.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated with low confidence

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Here are the banners of two separate containers (aka ‘pages’), both are different divs, but are exactly the same in design with the exception of the background image and the heading text.

The content layout of the page is designed to be central horizontally so that the user can see all the information clearly without having to scan the sides of the page. This can simply be done by placing all the content inside a larger container div with the styling set to place the div in the centre, which is able to be reused on each page to easily place the content into the middle area of the page.

In relation to how the information is conveyed on the website, I chose to place all the information in colourful boxes to catch the user’s eye. The website features a large amount of white space between the boxes containing the information to give the appearance of the boxes almost ‘popping’ out from the page.

A screenshot of a website

Description automatically generated with low confidence

This is an image of the home page of the website, displaying three colourful boxes against a white background purposefully designed to catch the user’s attention. Each button directs to another part of the site through the use of JavaScript.

The colour palette of the website was largely inspired by websites such as [‘Mind.org’](https://www.mind.org.uk/), using a bright colour scheme consisting primarily of white, blue and green in an effort to create a pleasing appearance and to make the content aimed at the user more eye-catching. By sticking to only a select few colours, the site maintains a clean consistent visual image and gives it a unique identity. It’s also generally more fitting for the topic of the site to use these uplifting and vibrant colours rather than drab, dark ones that could negatively affect the user’s mood.

In an effort to create a website that was accessible to all demographics, mainly in relation to age brackets, I chose to carefully select media that would appeal to a wide range of people; this is why most of the imagery is of an animated nature. Originally, I had real photographs as the media, but upon asking a peer about their opinion they commented on the clash of style. This choice turned out to be a fitting one as I believe the animated imagery suits the colour scheme and layout of the website far better than the live-action media did.

**Literature Review:**

Mental health has been a growing concern over recent years, an important topic that was once shrugged off is gradually becoming more commonly acknowledged and addressed. In the United States alone, it is estimated that one in five people (fifty-seven million) adults live with a mental illness, ranging from mild to severe (*Mental Illness*, n.d.). Even with the expanding knowledge being discovered, many people still find themselves suffering from the effects of mental health disorders and struggle to find information that could help them alleviate some of the factors that it brings. In this literature review, I’ll be going over recent findings and papers on the subject, and compiling ones that support advice shown in the project website, whilst also addressing some of the shortcomings and contradictions that they bring.

A recent factor in the rise of mental health conditions in the population has been attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a vast majority of the population being affected by this albeit in different ways. Tsamakis et al. (2021) in their research of the consequences of COVID-19 discuss how the pandemic affected a variety of different demographics, large concern was given to the shut-down of schools and education settings, in which remote learning became the new norm for many adolescents. They express that young students who are partaking in remote learning are struggling with feelings of loneliness and isolation due to being unable to socialise with their peers, whilst those who are in households containing elements of domestic issues or who are already suffering from mental health conditions are the most likely to be at increased risk. The researchers also found that the COVID pandemic also caused an increase in substance abuse and more susceptibility to addictive behaviours such as gambling and online gaming. McGinty et al. (2020) held research that supports these findings, fielding surveys that found a rise in distress reported by adults in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Loneliness and Isolation were not something that was exclusive and only caused by the pandemic however, these elements exist in everyday life and can be found in any setting. This is a common issue within schools, Stallard et al. (2008) conducted research on a program being tested in a school setting called the ‘FRIENDS’ program, classified as a ‘therapy emotional health programme’, aimed at providing personal support and a point of contact for students in the school. The personal support was conducted by trained school nurses and assessed 106 children, aged between nine to ten years old. The programme was seen to be a success, findings showed that 63 children who had been re-assessed for anxiety and self-esteem issues showed significant improvements in emotional health, more impressively these results were maintained even twelve months after the programme had ended. The program was such a success, that it has been expanded to four different age brackets, and now includes adults.

Whilst a lot of the treatments for mental health conditions are targeted toward improving a person’s mental well-being, it is less common knowledge that physical improvements can also positively benefit a person’s mental health massively; this has been recorded through a variety of different reasonings. Physical exercise has been proven to be extremely successful in the treatment of health conditions, physically and mentally. Prakash et al. (2017) found that in addition to the chemical release of endorphins and mitochondria whilst performing physical exercise (These two hormones relieve stress and provide energy, respectively, both acting as mood boosters.), physical exercise can also be attributed towards increased mood by reducing body weight, improving self-esteem, lowering blood pressure and by also acting as an anti-inflammatory, which Prakash attributes to certain mood disorders.

Other researchers whilst also calling the inclusion of physical exercise into treatment promising, suggest that more research is required to determine the effectiveness of exercise properly and accurately, as well as to overcome some of the methodical issues that have been displayed (Dunn & Jewell, 2010). Namely, Dunn & Jewell express concern that much of the research with regards to exercise has been primarily involving children, estimating that 24% of visits to paediatricians are for behavioural and mental disorders, whom they argue lack the proper training and tools to accurately record the results of exercise as a treatment.

Alongside exercising, one of the lesser known but majorly important treatments for mental health conditions, such as depression, is through meeting nutritional dietary requirements. The surprising link between nutrition and mood has been studied extensively throughout the years, many researchers believe there to be several numbers of direct correlations between a person's nutritional diet and the state of their mental health. With many purporting that further research into this link could provide a greater understanding of how the two processes connect with each other, potentially allowing for more efficient treatments and education on the condition. A collaboration between several researchers upon conducting a review of the literature found overwhelming evidence that diet can affect a person’s mental health; this can be attributed to whether it is directly caused due to the poor nutrition consumed or due to stress-related conditions that cause a change in an otherwise healthy person’s diet (*Bremner et al*, 2020). They also highlighted that recent literature has found a greater link to the influence of the gut microbiome on brain function and the effect it has on mood and behaviour.

Kris-Etherton et al. (2021) in their research towards discovering the causes of mental health issues and providing education to the public, echoed this sentiment; expressing in their findings that suboptimal nutrition is largely to blame in some cases for mental health disorders and could be one of the main barriers in attempting to treat people with the conditions, suggesting that healthy eating that meets nutritional needs may assist in the treatment of depression and anxiety.

A factor that is very recent but has caused widespread harm to many people’s mental health, is the increased cost of living crisis currently affecting people across all demographics. Reports from January 2023 have indicated that 92% of UK households have suffered from the increased cost of living when compared to the previous year (*Topic: Cost of Living Crisis UK*, 2023). Broadbent et al. (2023) predict that due to the increased cost of living and rise in poverty, the United Kingdom could see a rise of over four hundred and forty thousand additional children suffering from common mental disorders. When also combined with the introduction of Austerity and cuts to public services, it’s evident that people’s ability to access the services is decreasing; as noted by Cummins (2018) whose research into the effects of Austerity since 2010 concluded that the policy has increased the burden of mental distress.

**Conclusion:**

Awareness around mental health and the gradual removal of the stigma surrounding it have made great strides forward in recent years, but it’s clear there’s still more that can be done to help. Whilst the research into the topic has provided greater insight and improved the treatment options available, austerity and cuts to public services have made access to these services harder to obtain. And as a by-product of the cost of living increases, people are likely to be less able to find time away from essential obligations such as work to find treatment. Whilst my website isn’t a miraculous solution to these issues, I believe the information I’ve conveyed through it would help to provide some useful and beneficial advice to anyone seeking help. I would, however, have liked to have included more information regarding other elements that could offer relief to someone suffering from a mental health disorder, such as advice about therapy services and similar helplines, alongside potentially having added links to mainstream third-party charities, in this case though, I decided to keep the information on the site constrained to its own service as to hold sole responsibility.

In regards to the website design, I’d like to have implemented more robust responsiveness to the site; possibly through the use of converting many of the ‘divs’ to a ‘flex box’ style, which is a far more robust and full-proof modern method of creating a responsive website instead of using media queries, which is what I used but requires an individual query entry for each different screen size. In regards to the website design, I’d like to have implemented more robust responsiveness to the site; possibly through the use of converting many of the ‘divs’ to a ‘flex box’ style, which is a far more robust and full-proof modern method of creating a responsive website instead of using media queries, which is what I used but requires an individual query entry for each different screen size.

**References**

* **Bremner, J. D., Moazzami, K., Wittbrodt, M. T., Nye, J. A., Lima, B. B., Gillespie, C. F., Rapaport, M. H., Pearce, B. D., Shah, A. J., & Vaccarino, V. (2020). Diet, Stress and Mental Health. Nutrients, 12(8), 2428.** [**https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12082428**](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12082428)
* **Broadbent, P., Thomson, R. M., Kopasker, D., McCartney, G., Meier, P., Richiardi, M., McKee, M., & Katikireddi, S. V. (2023). The public health implications of the cost-of-living crisis: outlining mechanisms and modelling consequences. The Lancet Regional Health, 27, 100585.** [**https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2023.100585**](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2023.100585)
* **Dunn, A. L., & Jewell, J. A. (2010). The Effect of Exercise on Mental Health. Current Sports Medicine Reports, 9(4), 202–207.** [**https://doi.org/10.1249/jsr.0b013e3181e7d9af**](https://doi.org/10.1249/jsr.0b013e3181e7d9af)
* **Kris-Etherton, P. M., Petersen, K. S., Hibbeln, J. R., Hurley, D. L., Kolick, V., Peoples, S., Rodriguez, N., & Woodward-Lopez, G. (2021). Nutrition and behavioral health disorders: depression and anxiety. Nutrition Reviews, 79(3), 247–260.** [**https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuaa025**](https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuaa025)
* **McGinty, E. E., Presskreischer, R., Han, H., & Barry, C. L. (2020). Psychological Distress and Loneliness Reported by US Adults in 2018 and April 2020. JAMA, 324(1), 93.** [**https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.9740**](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.9740)
* **Mental Illness. (n.d.). National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).** [**https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness#:~:text=Mental%20illnesses%20are%20common%20in,mild%20to%20moderate%20to%20severe**](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness#:~:text=Mental%20illnesses%20are%20common%20in,mild%20to%20moderate%20to%20severe)**.**
* **Prakash, M. D., Stojanovska, L., Polenakovic, M., Bosevski, M., & Apostolopoulos, V. (2017). Exercise and mental health. Maturitas, 106, 48–56.** [**https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.09.003**](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.09.003)
* **Stallard, P., Simpson, N., Anderson, S. L., & Goddard, M. (2008). The FRIENDS emotional health prevention programme. European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 17(5), 283–289.** [**https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-007-0665-5**](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-007-0665-5)
* **K., Tsiptsios, D., Ouranidis, A., Mueller, C., Schizas, D., Terniotis, C., Nikolakakis, N., Tyros, G., Kympouropoulos, S., Lazaris, A. C., Spandidos, D. A., Smyrnis, N., & Rizos, E. (2021). COVID‑19 and its consequences on mental health (Review). Experimental and Therapeutic Medicine, 21(3).** [**https://doi.org/10.3892/etm.2021.9675**](https://doi.org/10.3892/etm.2021.9675)
* **Topic: Cost of living crisis UK. (2023, March 8). Statista.** [**https://www.statista.com/topics/9121/cost-of-living-crisis-uk/#topicOverview**](https://www.statista.com/topics/9121/cost-of-living-crisis-uk/#topicOverview)
* **Uk, R. (n.d.-b). student mental health report 2022.** [**https://www.randstad.co.uk/student-mental-health-report-2022/**](https://www.randstad.co.uk/student-mental-health-report-2022/)