**Clifford W. Beers Award Nomination Statement**

In 2016, Ravi Sharma lost a friend to suicide. This friend was the life of the party and always seemed happy, so this got Ravi thinking. He began to dig deeper, and learned that his friend took his life because of an unnecessary stigma tied to mental health. This event pushed Ravi to investigate the explore the mental health space. He saw many gaps between access to care and the delivery of quality care. Ultimately, this experience, along with many others, propelled Ravi to launch OOTify, a social enhancement platform designed to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health and make quality mental healthcare accessible.

Ravi’s background is predominately in structured finance and banking. He went to the University of Southern California, and during his time in college, founded a tele-health company that made medical records electronic for hospitals. His most recent positon before OOTify was at Western Asset Management, where he managed a portfolio worth over $1 billion. Ravi understands the impact the right technology can have in the mental health space, and is committed to making OOTify the go-to platform for seeking help.

As Ravi set off on this journey, somewhere along the way, he met Michael (Mike) Quiñones. Mike joined Ravi as the Chief Creative Officer and Co-founder of OOTify. Mike had multiple family members affected by mental illnesses, like manic depressive disorder and opioid addiction. Fortunately, Mike had a strong family support structure allowing him to battle through it. He went to the Loyola Marymount University Film School in Los Angeles, and has a background in advertising and producing for various companies, like Adidas and Lululemon. Mike hopes to utilize his expertise to change the mental health conversation by building a positive community.

In the Hindi language, “oot” means to lift up, so OOTify is the act of lifting up one another. Our platform allows users to anonymously and securely engage certified mental health professionals, such as therapists, life coaches, and verified mentors. Our mantra is simple – accept, communicate, and enhance. Once you accept others and/or your challenge, we connect you with the right person so you can get the support that you need.  In doing so, we hope you're able to enhance yourself and your relationships.

OOTify is a social enhancement platform that is designed to connect millennials and iGen to mental health professionals, life coaches, and mentors. The mental health space currently doesn’t connect with young people in the ways they mainly communicate with their peers and OOTify’s platform does just that. By utilizing artificial intelligence to streamline the intake process, OOTify connects you instantly to a professional or peer based on what you’re looking for so you can get straight into productive conversations.

On the flip side, the platform is designed to make it easier for professionals to connect with their clients, by providing HIPAA compliant communication options of messaging, audio, and video conferencing so that relationships between professionals and their clients can grow organically.

OOTify is committed to breaking the stigma around mental health in America. We have developed a brand that connects with young people about mental health in a new and positive way. We’ve created multiple verticals to engage with and promote quality mental health such as a mobile application, content development, local community events, and an interactive social community to promote open dialogue with our peers. We’ve held events at Loyola Marymount, USC, and WeWork to name just a few.

Furthermore, our branding and social media plays an enormous role in the way we talk about mental health as stigma still has a hold of us all. Our branding is focused heavily on approaching conversations about mental health in a more welcoming, positive, and uplifting way. Through engaging animation, millennial focused content, and modern digital marketing strategies, we can make a dent in breaking down the social stigma around talking about our mental health. We’ve created a new, open type of community and are growing every day.

OOTify is more than just a mobile app, website, or brand. It’s a way of life. It’s a new perspective on our relationships with ourselves and one another. It’s a generational shift in the ways we connect with one another. There’s never been a more important time to address our mental health in America, and at OOTify, we’re doing just that.