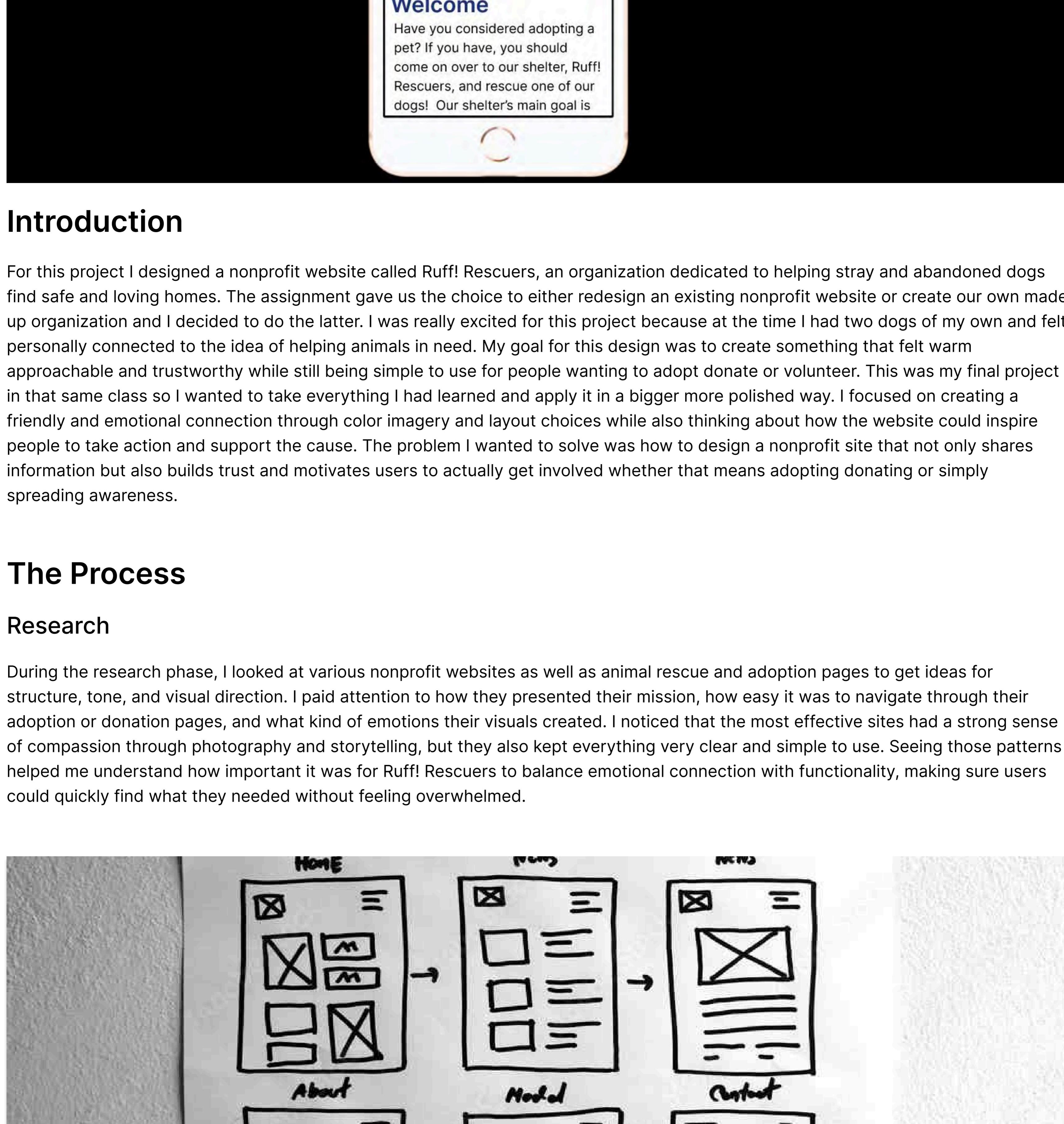


# Ruff Rescuers: Designing with Heart

Creating a compassionate and trustworthy nonprofit website experience that inspires users to adopt, donate, and make a difference.

BY ALAN MARTINEZ-DIAZ



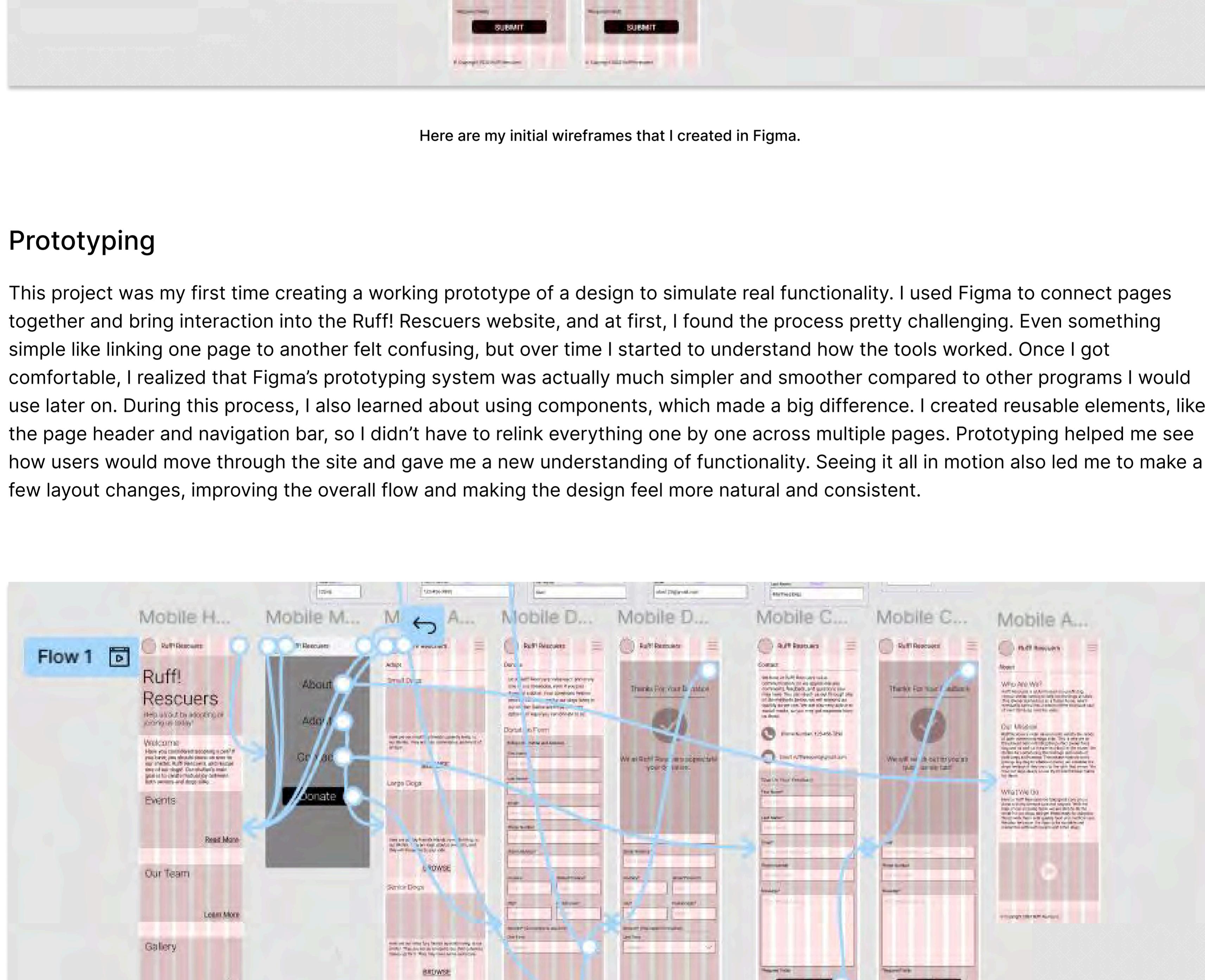
## Introduction

For this project I designed a nonprofit website called Ruff! Rescuers, an organization dedicated to helping stray and abandoned dogs find safe and loving homes. The assignment gave us the choice to either redesign an existing nonprofit website or create our own made up organization and I decided to do the latter. I was really excited for this project because at the time I had two dogs of my own and felt personally connected to the idea of helping animals in need. My goal for this design was to create something that felt warm, approachable and trustworthy while still being simple to use for people wanting to adopt, donate or volunteer. This was my final project in that same class so I wanted to take everything I had learned and apply it in a bigger more polished way. I focused on creating a friendly and emotional connection through color imagery and layout choices while also thinking about how the website could inspire people to take action and support the cause. The problem I wanted to solve was how to design a nonprofit site that not only shares information but also builds trust and motivates users to actually get involved whether that means adopting, donating or simply spreading awareness.

## The Process

### Research

During the research phase, I looked at various nonprofit websites as well as animal rescue and adoption pages to get ideas for structure, tone, and visual direction. I paid attention to how they presented their mission, how easy it was to navigate through their adoption or donation pages, and what kind of emotions their visuals created. I noticed that the most effective sites had a strong sense of compassion through photography and storytelling, but they also kept everything very clear and simple to use. Seeing those patterns helped me understand how important it was for Ruff! Rescuers to balance emotional connection with functionality, making sure users could quickly find what they needed without feeling overwhelmed.



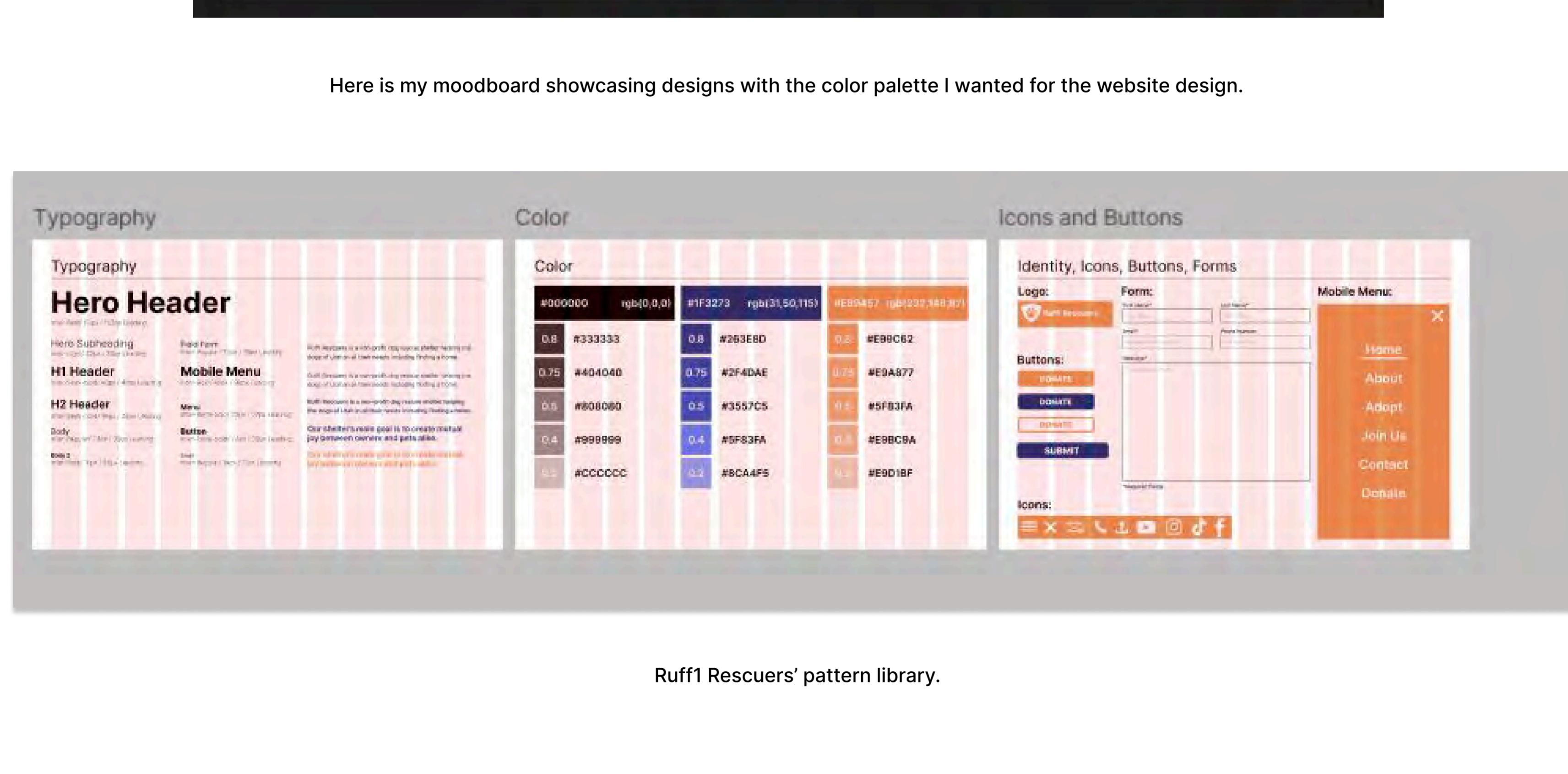
Here is a representation of how my sketches looked like.

### Sketching

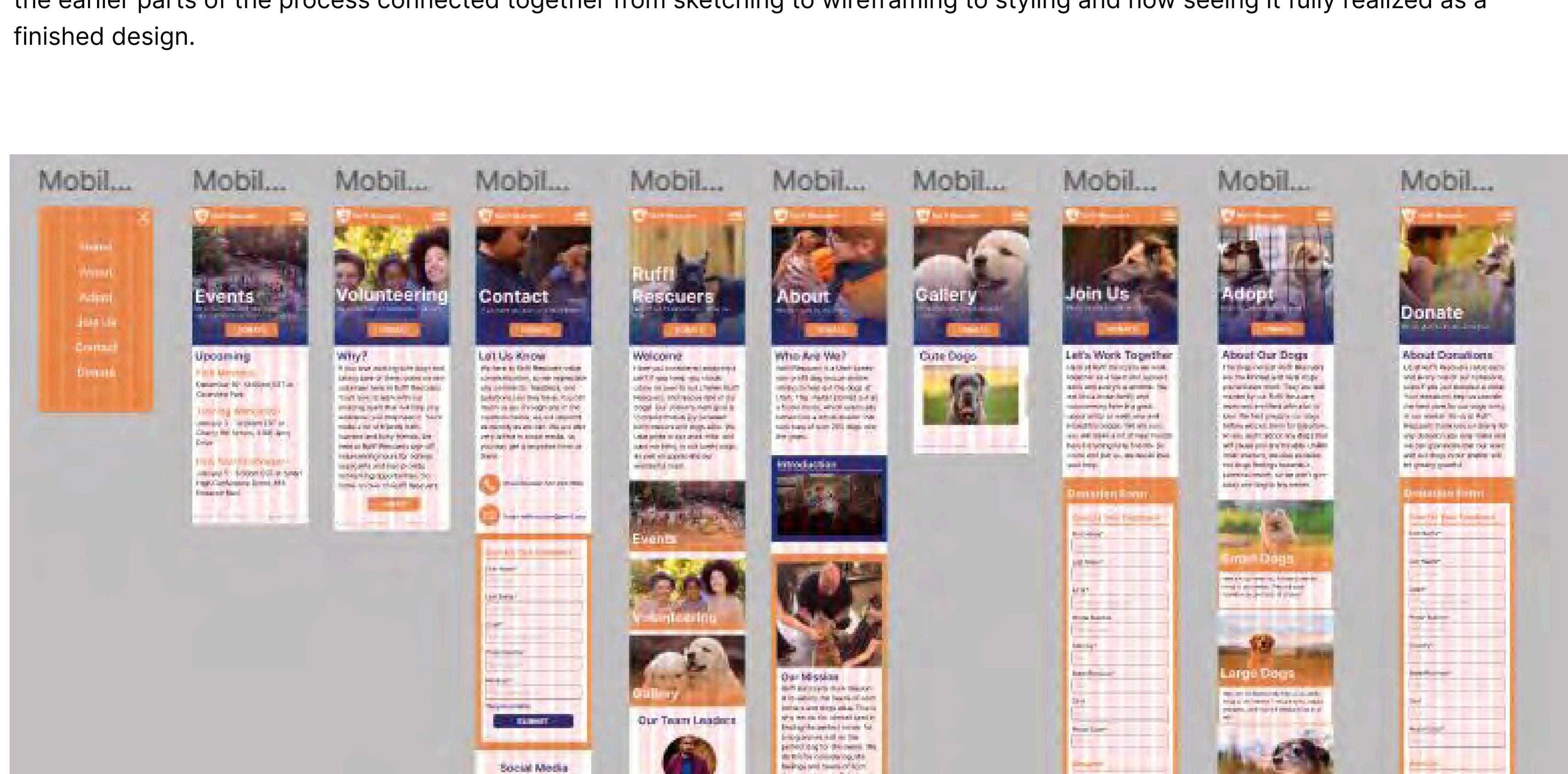
When looking back on this project, I actually tried to find the original sketches and photos of my drawings, but since this was completed almost two years ago, I was not able to locate them. However, I still remember this stage clearly because it's where my ideas for Ruff! Rescuers really started to take shape. I sketched both mobile and desktop versions of the website, exploring early ideas for key pages such as the Home, About Us, Adopt, Join Us, and Contact pages. Since this was a design project, the Contact page included placeholder information, but I wanted it to still feel realistic. I also designed additional sections like a Donations page, as well as smaller sub-pages for Events, Volunteer Sign-Up, and a Gallery to showcase photos of the dogs. I remember experimenting with many different layouts and creating multiple variations of the same pages to see what worked best visually and functionally. This stage really felt like the foundation of everything that came after, as it was during sketching that the concept started to form its identity and the design began to come alive.

### Wireframing

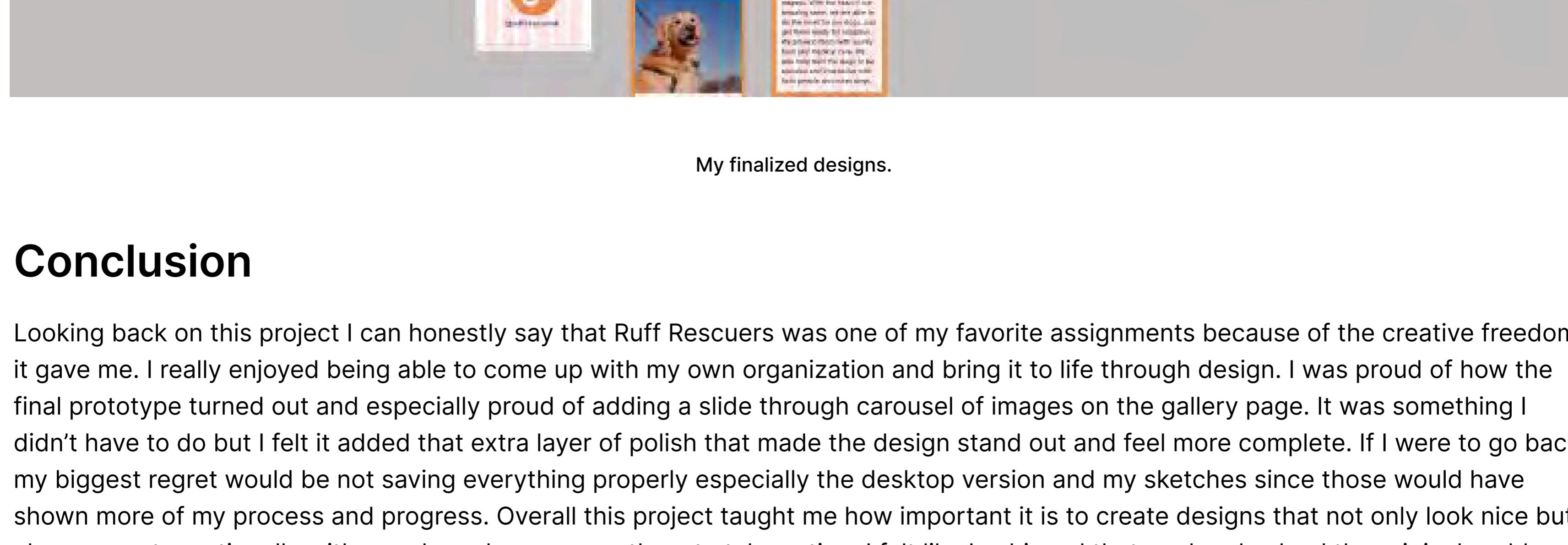
For this stage, I was only able to find my mobile wireframes, but they still show the direction and structure I wanted for Ruff! Rescuers. I took my most liked page ideas and interactions from my sketches and translated them into detailed wireframes in Figma. These included key pages such as the Home, Adopt, Donate, and Contact screens, as well as feedback and confirmation pages that helped the design feel more complete. Working in Figma allowed me to focus on alignment, spacing, and readability while making sure every section had a clear purpose. I wanted the wireframes to communicate how users would move through the site and how information would be presented before adding any color or imagery. This step helped me test out different layouts and refine the structure of the site, laying the groundwork for the prototyping stage where I brought these interactions to life.



Here are my initial wireframes that I created in Figma.



Here is the flow of connections of my prototype.



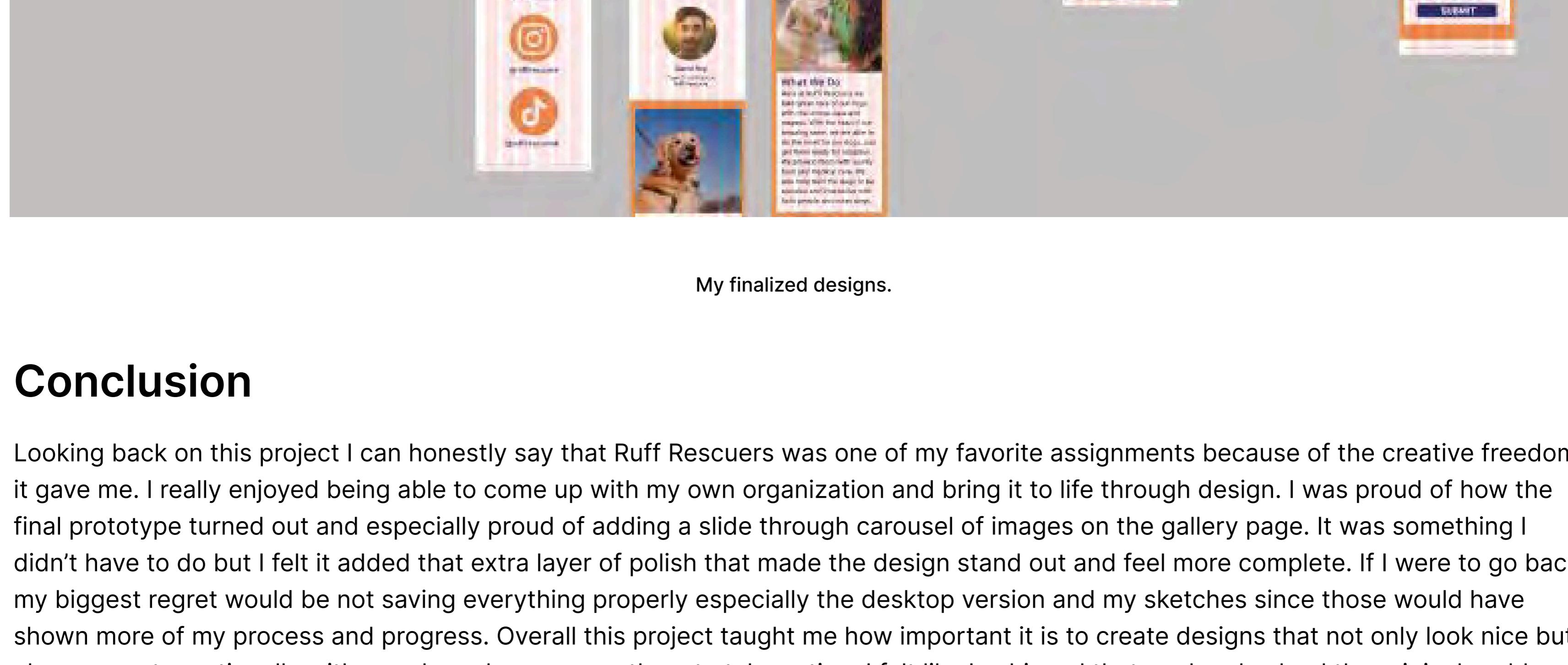
Here is my moodboard showcasing designs with the color palette I wanted for the website design.



Ruff! Rescuers' pattern library.

### Surface Comps – Finalizing My Design

This stage was where everything started to come together visually. Here I added all the final details including color, typography, and imagery to fully bring the Ruff! Rescuers design to life. I made sure to include high quality images that I found online because I wanted the visuals to feel warm and real while showing the personalities of the dogs. I also added gradients to give the design more depth and softness which helped the pages feel more modern and visually balanced. The combination of orange and blue worked even better than I expected once everything was in place making the site feel bright, friendly, and trustworthy. This step really showed how all the earlier parts of the process connected together from sketching to wireframing to styling and now seeing it fully realized as a finished design.



My finalized designs.

## Conclusion

Looking back on this project I can honestly say that Ruff! Rescuers was one of my favorite assignments because of the creative freedom it gave me. I really enjoyed being able to come up with my own organization and bring it to life through design. I was proud of how the final prototype turned out and especially proud of adding a slide through carousel of images on the gallery page. It was something I didn't have to do but I felt it added that extra layer of polish that made the design stand out and feel more complete. If I were to go back my biggest regret would be not saving everything properly especially the desktop version and my sketches since those would have shown more of my process and progress. Overall this project taught me how important it is to create designs that not only look nice but also connect emotionally with people and encourage them to take action. I felt like I achieved that goal and solved the original problem of making a nonprofit site that builds trust and inspires users to get involved.