

Sharing Our Story: A Student Support Group at Buena Vista University

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Introduction

COVID-19 affected undergraduate student's ways that no one foresaw.

Seeing a need for mental health resources on campus, we used our macro practice class to develop and launch a support group to help combat mental health issues among students.

This poster describes how we developed our group, gives examples of successful group activities, and suggests how this can be done on other college and university campuses.

How the Group Developed

After recognizing a need for a support group on campus, we consulted with Counseling Services to get approval to start the group. A graduate counseling intern was assigned to assist with the project. All involved contributed ideas for the weekly open group, which was advertised through the university newsletter and flyers.

The students, graduate intern and professor took part in the support group meetings and the different weekly activities.

Co-facilitators rotated weekly. Group participants were primarily recruited through friends and athletics on campus. Overall, the support was effective: Group participants gave positive feedback at the end of groups about the coping mechanisms and activities explored during group. They also shared that meeting in-person, even socially distanced and masked was helpful. Counseling Services decided to continue the group spring semester, which did indeed occur.

Group Activities

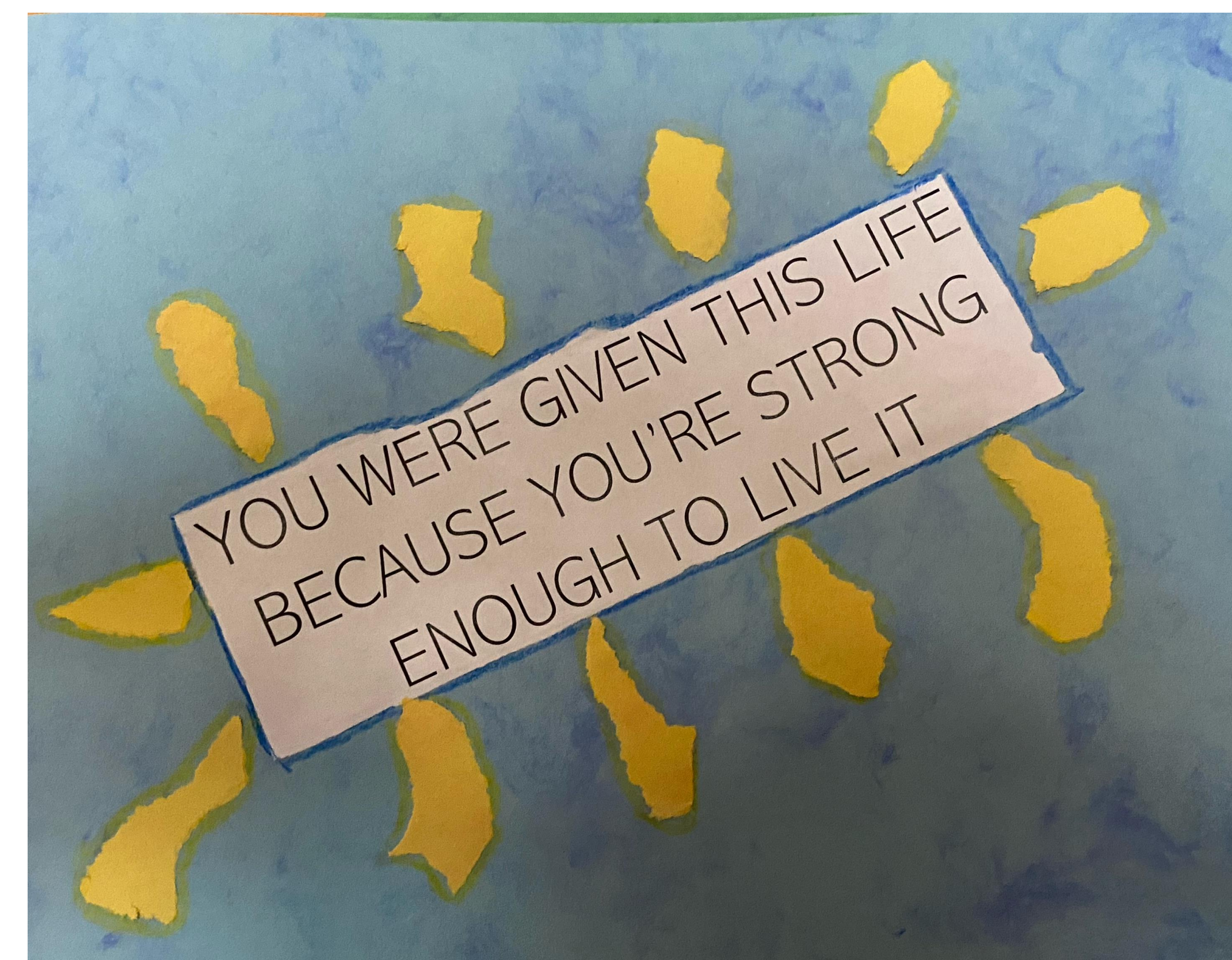
Time Management

- Time management is a common theme college students struggle with. Schedules are busy and can easily become overwhelming. Our first support group consisted of talking about time management skills and how to improve them.
- A personal scheduling template was used to allow participants to color in their schedule and share it during group.

Daily Schedule							Assignments this Week
Date:	10/20/2020	10/21/2020	10/22/2020	10/23/2020	10/24/2020	10/25/2020	
Time	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7:00 AM							
8:00 AM							
9:00 AM							
10:00 AM							
11:00 AM							
12:00 PM							
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10:00 PM							

Motivation

- Students were also struggling with motivation. The facilitator created motivational quotes which were used during the group to make motivational posters to inspire us to get our homework and other to-do list items done.
- For this group, we used construction paper, colored pencils, printed out quotes, and tape. If group participants did not like the quotes provided, they were able to use their own.



Breathing Exercises

- During the third support group a co-facilitator and led us in breathing exercises. The breathing exercises were translated into a handout for the group participants to take home.
- A lot of our participants did enjoy this activity as they said they were able to not only relax during it but planned to use this activity in the future.

"Dear Activity"

- In this activity, students wrote letters to family members that have passed away. The next to last support group happened shortly before Thanksgiving, so we saw this as a fitting activity. We did modify the activity so students could also write to family members who would not be able to travel home for the holidays due to the pandemic. Alternatively, they could write to COVID-19 about the frustrations in their life that are caused by COVID-19.
- We offered group members the opportunity to read their letter aloud, however, most people felt their letters were too personal. Instead, participants talked about whom they wrote and why they chose to write to them.

About BVU

Buena Vista University is a small private campus located in Storm Lake Iowa. Campus life is usually a big contributing factor as to why students choose our university. There are 60+ clubs on campus and 700+ students who live on our campus. Some of the COVID-19 related policies Buena Vista University put into place included limiting the number of people (guests) in dorm rooms to zero and having no off-campus guests. Events were completely put on hold, then moved to virtual, making it difficult for student involvement with on-campus organizations.



Recommendations

This support group can be applied to many universities. In order to implement a support group at your own university, identify stake-holders that can assist with and advocate for the project, then reach out to counseling services or another administrative entity and obtain approval prior to beginning.