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Beyond the Resilience Narrative: A Case Study in Integrating Art Therapy as Self-Care at the University of Michigan Library

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University of Michigan Library

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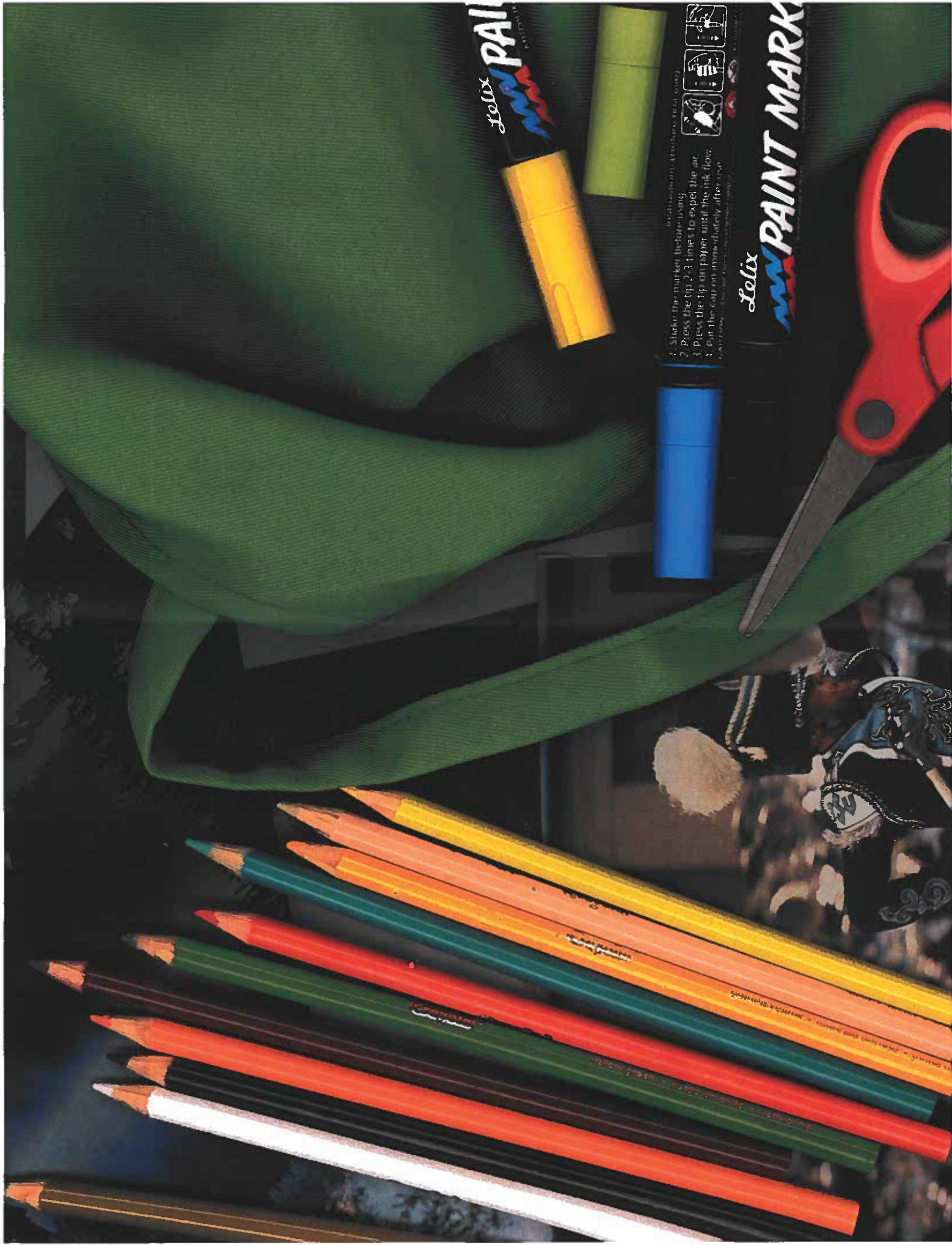
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Lelux PAINT MARK

1. Shake the marker before using.
2. Press the tip 2-3 times to expel the air.
3. Press the tip on paper until the ink flows.
4. Put the cap on immediately after use.

Lelux PAINT MARK

In the Beginning...

The practice of engaging in self-care to ensure your mental and physical wellness has by its very nature, placed the onus on the individual, without addressing the underlying structures and practices that can foster this need. Recognizing that asking individuals to engage in self-care without actively providing avenues that can fulfill this need, Naomi Binnie, Sheila Garcia, and Breanna Hamm came together to create the Art Alliance Interest Group. The Art Alliance is a group that provides open workshops and group sessions with certified therapists that lead employees from the University of Michigan (U-M) library in creating art as a form of self-care.

Goals

The Art Alliance aims to provide an inclusive and safe space for all employees of the University of Michigan Library to consume and create art as a self-care practice. Through open workshops, group art therapy sessions with certified therapists, and regular group outings, the group will promote and contribute to the overall wellness of all library employees.

References

Berg, J., Galvan, A., & Tewell, E. (2018). Responding to and reimagining resilience in academic libraries. *Journal of New Librarianship*, 3(1), 3218. <https://doi.org/10.21173/newlibs/4/1>



Research and Creative Projects Grant

The Art Alliance became possible through a \$1500 grant from the library's Research and Creative Projects Committee. This grant allowed us to purchase supplies, host a local certified therapist for a kick-off event, and allocate funding for the eventual creation of a yearly Art Alliance zine. Through additional funding provided by the Library Dean's Office, we are also able to provide light refreshments for group therapy sessions.

Successes

The vast majority of feedback we received was positive, regardless of whether or not respondents attended open workshops. Many believe that open workshops not only allow time to destress during the workday, but that it has also built community among individuals who love to create, regardless of experience or level of ability. Among the questions we asked in our survey, was an ask to rank the relevance of six terms to the work of our group. As shown below, "De-stress" and "Self-Care" ranked highest in terms of relevance, while "Community", "Inclusive", and "Self-Space" ranked lower, indicating that we have some work to do in this regard.

Challenges

In June of 2019, the Art Alliance disseminated a survey to all employees that sought to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions individuals had regarding the work of the group, as well as to what extent the group was fulfilling its stated mission.

From the results, several challenges were noted, among them being the need to get the word out about upcoming workshops more widely and varying location(s) and time(s) for the workshops. We also noted that increased understanding and buy-in from managers could assist in ensuring more individuals feel empowered to attend. This is an ongoing effort that we hope to improve and build upon.

Moving Beyond Resilience

Staff working in academic libraries are often asked to develop “resilience” when faced with workplace challenges like being overworked, underpaid, or facing inadequate funding. According to Berg, Galvan, & Tewell (2018), “promoting a resilient mindset means workers must revisit wounds and then overcome them, often at the expense of healing or reflection.”

Expecting resilience of staff, rather than resilience of the institution, places the responsibility of change and growth on the worker, and the institution is allowed to remain as it is. The Art Alliance aimed to use our library’s funds to develop an *institutional* culture around self-care. In addition to using funds to purchase supplies and pay for a group therapist, we scheduled our workshops and field trips during work hours, emphasizing that staff should be encouraged to engage in self-care, art, and therapeutic activities throughout the work day while they are being paid.

Available Supplies

Acrylic paint
Mini canvases
Rocks
Construction paper
Permanent markers
Markers
Crayons
Colored pencils
Drawing pencils
Pens
Scissors (including left hand scissors)
Glue sticks
Old magazines

Workshop Topics

Kickoff Event with Art Therapist, 2/14/19
Zentangle, 2/27/19
Scribble Drawings, 3/13/2019
Past, present, future self-portrait, 3/27/19
Upcycling with Library Diversity Council, 4/24/19
Heart Map, 5/7/19
Working on Previous Pieces, 6/5/19
Collage Your Worries Away, 7/2/19
Creating Art with Music, 7/18/19