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Unlocking Your College Adventure: Connections Cure!

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Executive Summary



Have you ever wondered what life would be like if you decided to jump outside your comfort zone? Do you feel like you need a change from your social connections or lack thereof? Do you crave more than the common interests you share with acquaintances? Soon-to-be high school graduates will need to be informed more than ever due to COVID-19 and its frequent lockdowns, causing a shift in their socialization. These students are often set within their cliques and unable even to have time to think about the possibility of more.

Incoming freshmen going into college need to understand that some of their closest connections can come from people completely different from them. Putting themselves out there, even when it seems frightening, is the first step to living a healthy and fulfilling life. Figuring out that they can express themselves and be seen by people they never would have imagined being in their lives is a rewarding experience that needs to be encouraged. Whether they had a positive or negative experience in High School, it does not mean they need to be placed into another box again. It is time for them to take themselves out of that box and figure out what makes them happy because they never know what direction life will take them.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Establishing peer mentoring or buddy systems can provide emotional support and reduce feelings of loneliness. Utilizing existing counseling services, mental health centers, and student organizations. Incorporating social activities during orientation to help students build connections early on.

Weakness

Some students may hesitate to seek help due to the stigma associated with loneliness or mental health issues. Students might not be aware of available resources or strategies to combat loneliness. Loneliness often peaks during the transition to college life.

Opportunities

Organize social events, clubs, and workshops to foster connections among students. Leverage social media and virtual platforms to create online communities where students can interact. Encourage faculty to promote a supportive and inclusive classroom environment.

Threats

The pandemic may have exacerbated loneliness due to remote learning and limited social interactions. High academic demands can lead to isolation if students prioritize studying over socializing. Financial difficulties can contribute to loneliness and affect mental well-being.

The Problem

The problem we are trying to solve is loneliness in college students. We want to encourage students to use the resources their campus provides, attend social activities and events, and find ways to cope with these feelings of sadness. Many students may have yet to learn that they have access to resources to help them through this difficult time. By providing resources and support, we hope to create a more supportive environment for college students and foster a sense of community (Smith, 2023). To narrow the problem, We considered the possible causes and their impact on academic performance and personal well-being. We also looked at the available resources to help alleviate the problem and how they could be made more accessible to the affected students (Deng, 2022).

Students need to recognize these feelings and take the necessary steps. We can encourage students to change their mindsets, join clubs and extracurricular activities, reconnect with old friends, practice being comfortable by themselves, be more outgoing, or get help from the resources provided at their campus (Daino, 2023). By implementing these strategies, we will have more connected communities that ensure the safety of their students.



5 Key Findings

#1 Feeling included on campus can encourage students to feel more comfortable forming connections with peers in their community.

“When young people are able to forge a sense of belongingness to their university, they are able to benefit from mutual connection and contribution to the broad community as well as from specific individuals in that community”
(Costello et al., 2022)

#2 Young adults entering college today had a gap in their socialization during their growth period, which increased their loneliness and insecurity about making connections.

“Americans currently aged 18–24 have endorsed 63% increases in their levels of loneliness and depression over the past decade, prior to the onset of COVID-19”
(Thakur et al., 2022)

#3 Students need to be taught communication skills and be accepting of inclusion and diversity once they enter a new, more mature environment.

“Research for decades has shown that the relationships students cultivate in college – with professors, staff and fellow students – are key to success. human connections matter for learning and well-being in college – they also set students up for professional and personal fulfillment after they graduate.”
(Artze-Vega et al., 2023)

#4 Students moving out of home for the first time can finally fully understand their ambitions and beliefs. They cannot do so without the necessary tools.

“For teens in particular, they’re really in that phase of development where they’re trying to figure out who they are, what they want to be, what are their values, how do they differentiate themselves from their parents, maybe from their heritage or culture” (Kognito, 2022)

#5 First-year students must adapt to the many different adjustments of living at college for the first time. They should also remember that they must have fun for themselves.

“The high incidence of loneliness among first-year students is probably because of their short-term residence at the university to adapt to the new environment. For this reason, it is necessary for university managers to provide some kind of recreational activities and programs for freshmen.” (Zahedi et al., 2022)

Methods

104 Survey respondents



50 Secondary articles



3 Interviews



Key Survey Findings

What we learned about college students was overwhelming: 69% felt lonely, 67% felt left out, and 60% felt a lack of companionship.

When asking students why they find it difficult to form connections, 38% found it difficult to adjust to college, 29% were uncomfortable in unfamiliar environments, 26% were too shy to create connections, and 24% did not know where to start.

When students were asked, 55% would like to socialize with more students in their communities, and 48% would like to hear more about the resources available to them.



Interview Key Findings

We conducted three interviews, here are some of the quotes we found interesting.....

Attending their campus activities:

“I have participated in activities around campus and have made connections that way.”

“I use my campus activities. I have made connections with students and am content with where I'm at.”

“Physical activity is what I use to socialize with peers or clear my head.”
My favorite place to clear my head is the gym and socialize with people who have similar interests as me.”

What their campus does well or can improve on:

“We have a club fair event every semester and there are tons of them. People love to join them.”

“If new incoming students had more of an idea and someone to look up to for guidance then I believe students would feel more comfortable opening up.”

“I believe that if we didn't start off having orientation groups and activities then I would not have met as many peers as I have. ”

Experiencing these feelings:

“I could see how other students may have feelings of loneliness at this campus.”

“Yes, I know many people who tend to isolate themselves.”

Overall, we see that students who participate in activities on their campus feel that they have an easier time forming connections. The interviewees did not admit to being lonely themselves, but they know students who have these tendencies of not putting themselves out there.

Creative Strategy

Our audience is optimistic but is often held back by their lack of connections. The pandemic created a gap in these young adults’ socialization development, making these students feel less confident in their abilities to form meaningful relationships. The audience is feeling isolated and unsure about themselves, causing impacts leading to anxiety and depression.

The Desired Response:

Insights:

We want the audience to know that forming connections can be easy if they put in the effort. Attending activities and clubs can push them to approach people they never would have otherwise. Simply showing students that by showing up for themselves, they can indulge in their favorite hobbies while forming connections with people they never imagined.

The stubbornness of high school graduates may make them feel like we are forcing them to socialize or that they are feeling silly learning. They may need help forming connections. But we encourage them to attend events and activities that interest them because what's the harm?

Statement Strategy

To encourage incoming students that stepping outside of their comfort zone and attending activities around campus will help form connections with peers because everyone is making an effort towards the same thing

Target Audience Research

students reported feeling “very lonely” in college over the last year. (LCSW-R, 2023)

60%

77%

of college students need help for emotional or mental health problems, and a majority experienced a worsening of their emotional health after the COVID-19 pandemic. (Smith, 2023)

of current college students reported that they are currently concerned with feeling lonely. (Sodexo, 2022)

53%

The Big Idea



College is a chance for students to explore and discover more about themselves with the help of others. Forging relationships with people utterly different from them and pushing themselves outside their comfort zones comes with many learning experiences. Experiencing connections helps develop these young adults to grow into individuals.

CONNECTIONS CURE

Target Audience

Our target audience is comprised of college students aged 18 to 24 in Massachusetts. These individuals grapple with loneliness, a shared experience during this transformative phase of life. They face challenges such as limited social support, restricted access to resources, and mental health issues. Yet, within these struggles lies the potential for resilience and growth. Together, we'll explore pathways to belonging and foster connections that illuminate their journey.



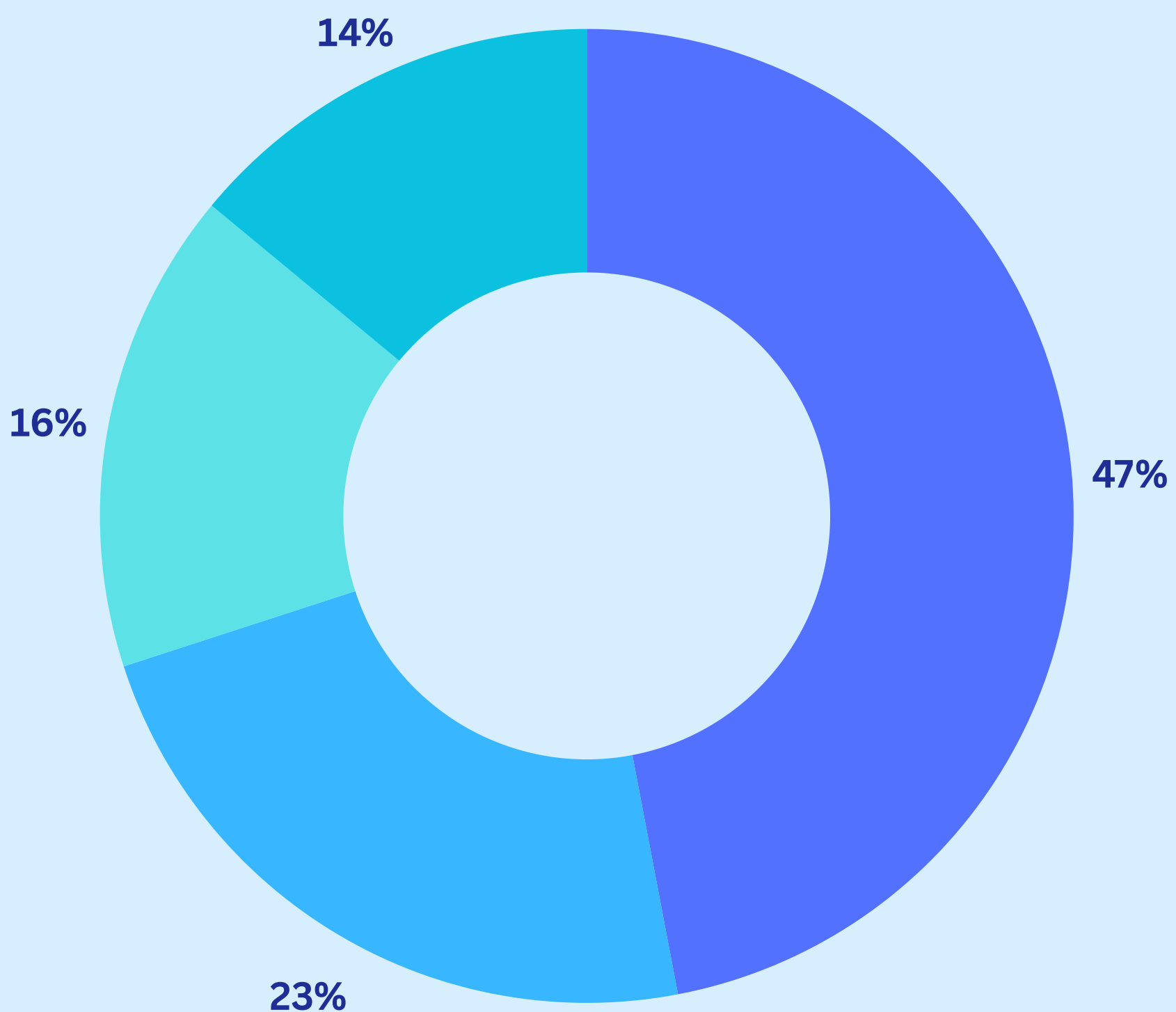
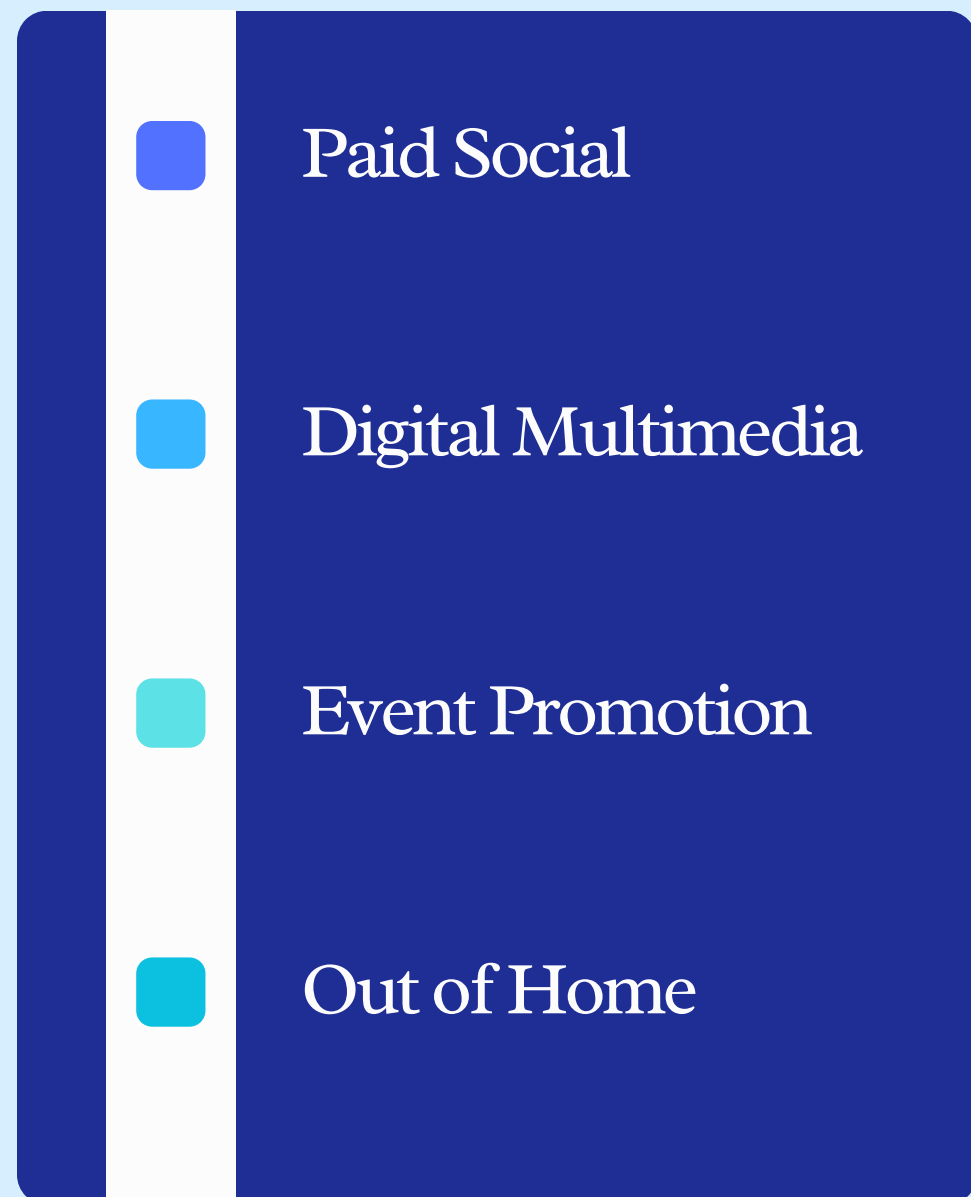
High school athletes, busy with practices, games, and meetings, often prioritize sports over socializing. They tend to stay within their sports circle, missing out on broader connections. Imagine a world without sports. College is their chance to form new bonds.

Performing and visual arts students often have less time to socialize outside of their activities and are perceived as outsiders in high school. We must break the stigma around them and encourage these students to branch out in college to avoid their work consuming their entire lives.



Academic-driven students prioritize school and may not focus on making connections with peers. Encouraging them to make more time for themselves is crucial for forming lifelong connections, especially in college, where having a support system can make the transition smoother.

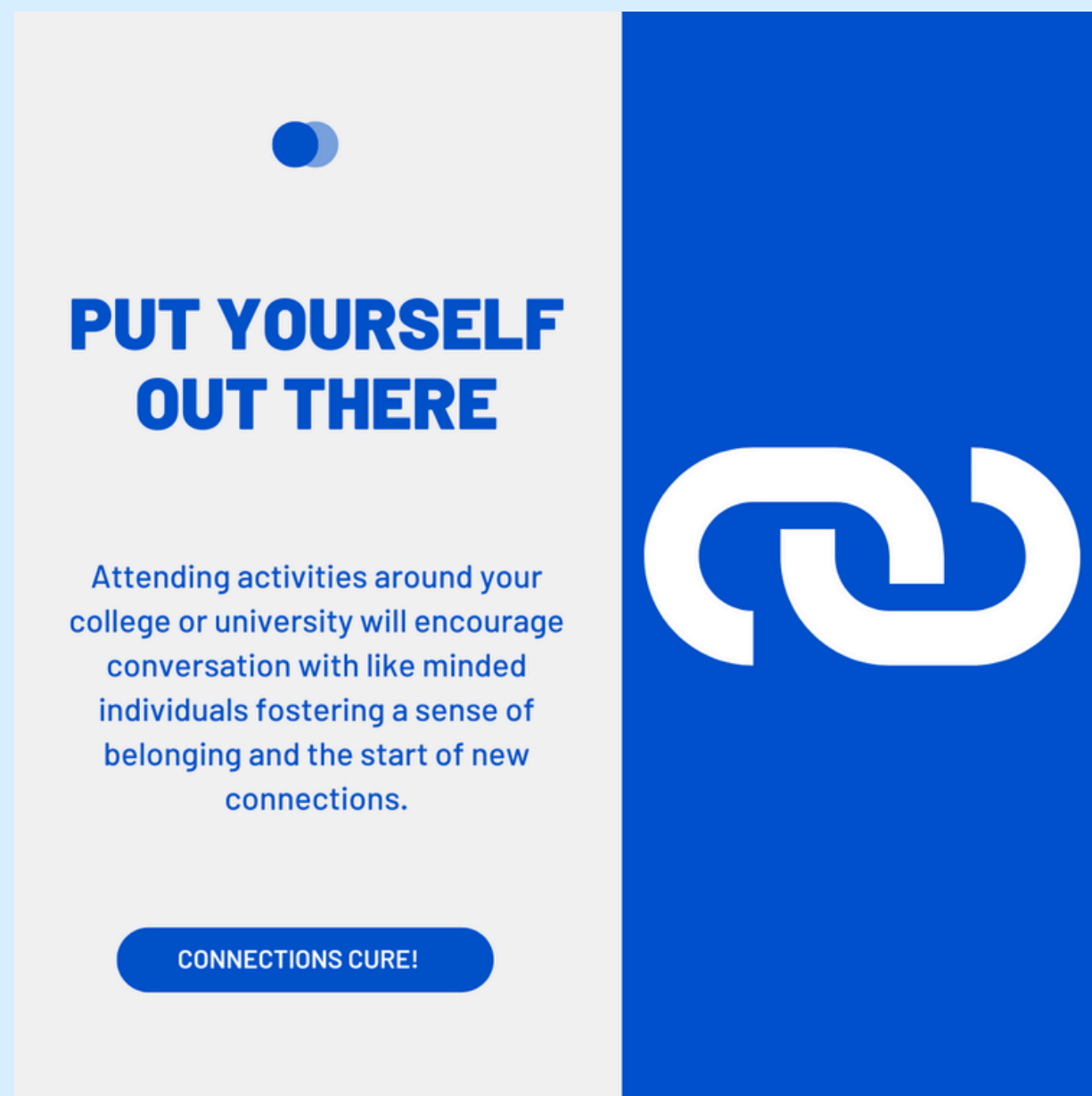
Media Allocation



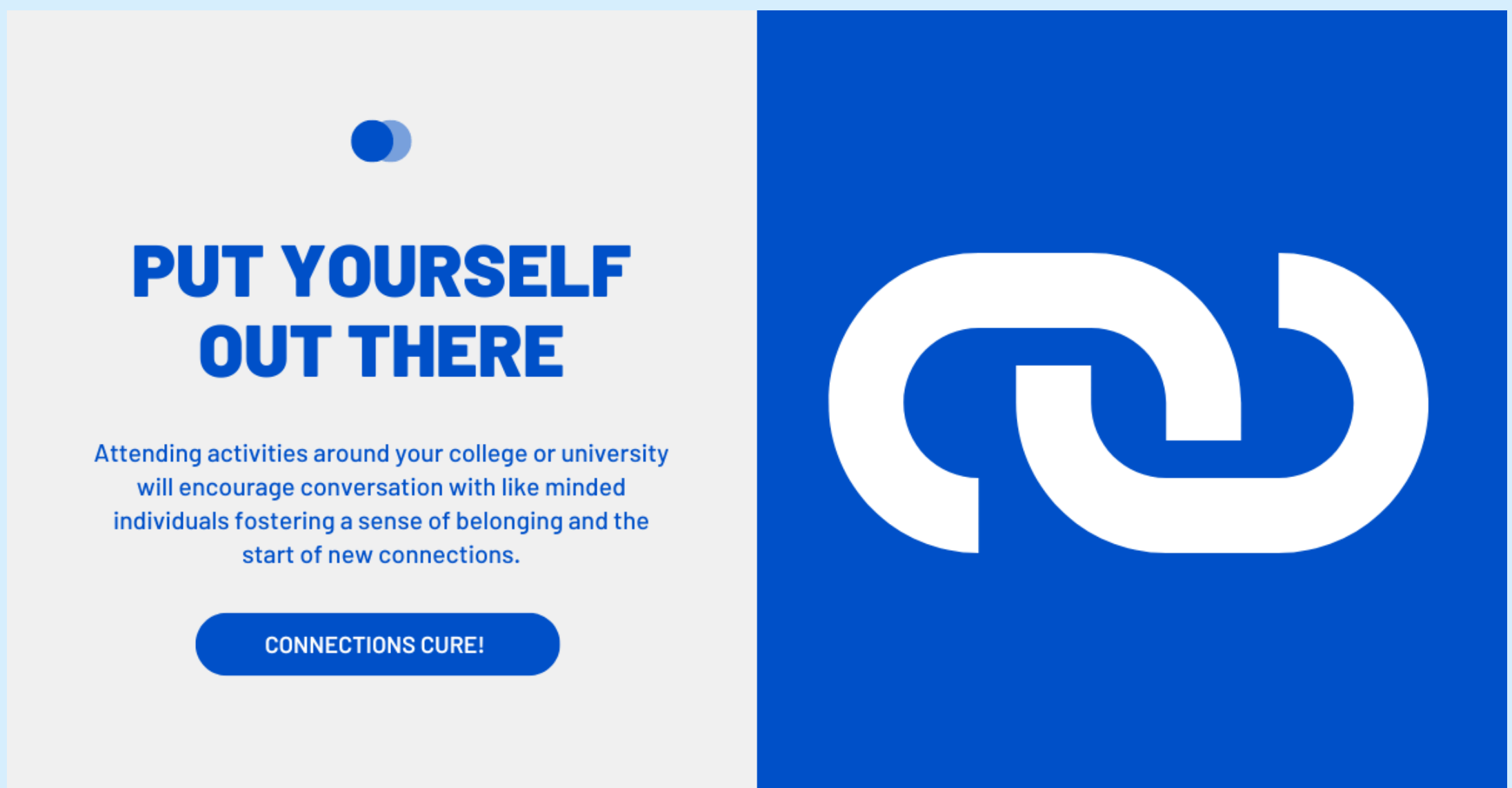
Media Plan

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Paid Social



Instagram



Facebook

Incoming College students in this generation want to ensure their social media displays their best qualities for making friends or finding their roommate. We want to ensure they know there are more ways than social media to make connections. We will provide posts encouraging the student body to participate in events or activities around campus in their communities. The pandemic is over, so it is time to put virtual reality aside and take action towards their college experiences.

Event Promotions

Welcome Week

Rather than just any other student orientation, Welcome Week includes interactive events of their choosing. Students can participate in multiple activities during their first week on campus. Could you skip the boring icebreakers? These students want to be active and engaged. Whether it's arts and crafts or playing basketball, these students get an opportunity to get to know each other without the pressure of being put on the spot.

CONNECTIONS CURE

SEPTEMBER 2024

WELCOME WEEK

#1

Arts and crafts

#2

Athletics

#3

Open mic night

#4

Trivia night

#5

Farmers market

#6

Movie night

#7

Video games

Digital Multimedia

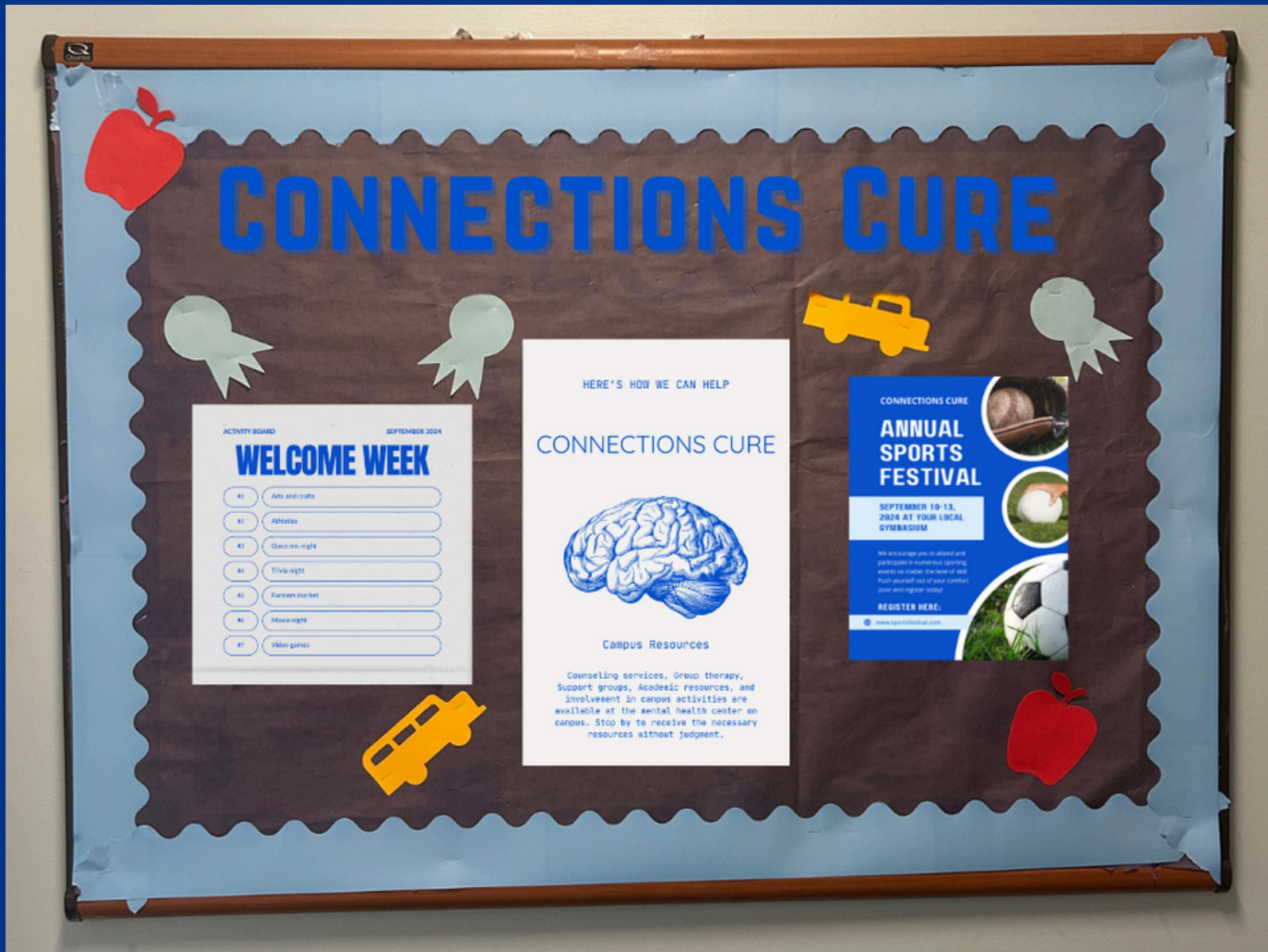


(Audio attached)

Ads will run through platforms like Spotify and YouTube, providing quick messages promoting attending activities or events in their community. The goal is to show that students are getting support in this journey and that many resources are available. Attending activities in college is one of the easiest ways to form connections, so why not try it? Everyone goes for the same reasons, so why not start encouraging them now?

Out of Home

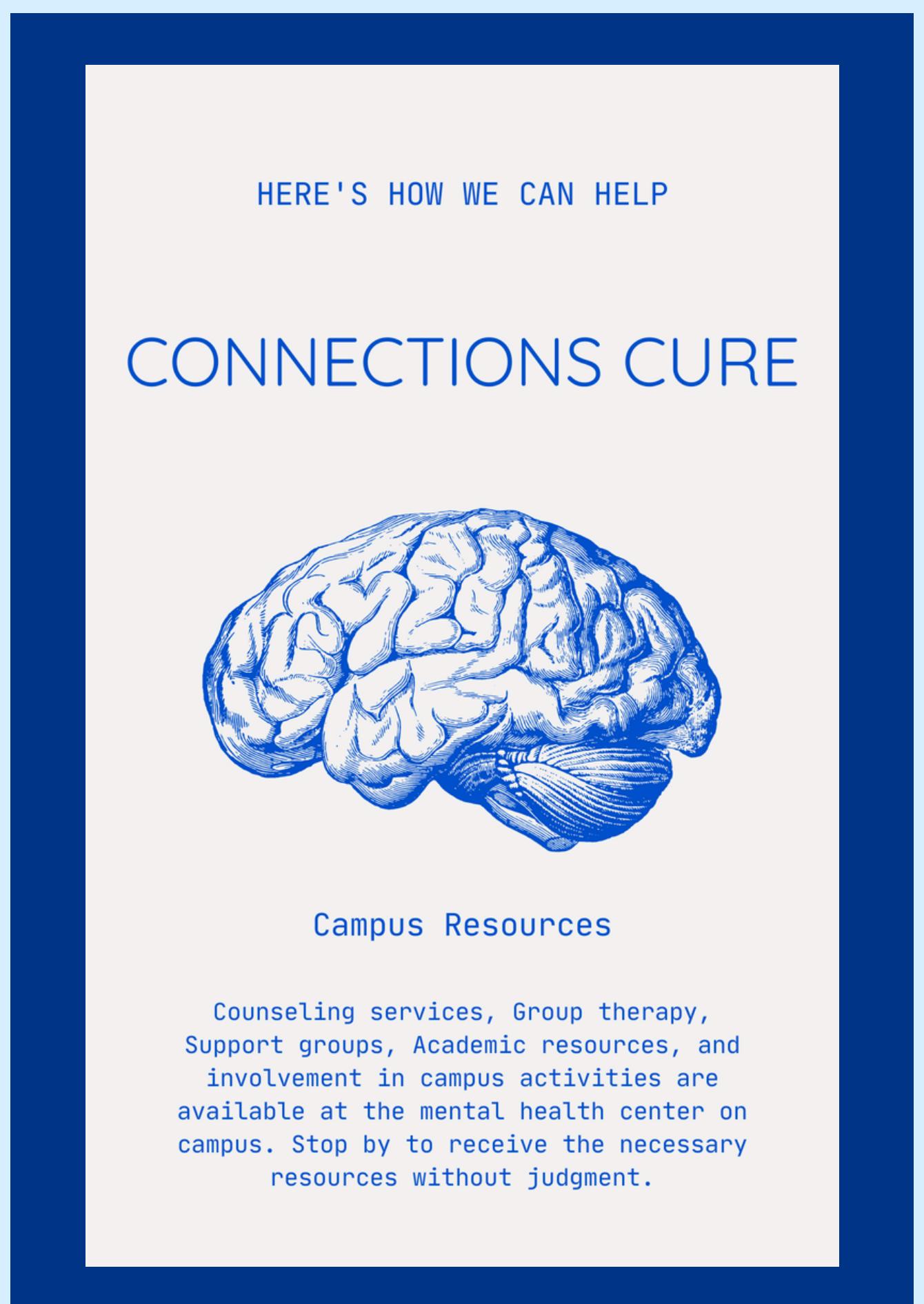
There will be weekly bulletin boards around campus to show students what upcoming activities they may want to attend. College is the time to figure out who students are, express themselves, and attend some activities. They never know who they will end up becoming friends with.



There will be posters around each campus in Massachusetts, providing students with the resources they may need.

Loneliness and social isolation are the root of other mental illnesses.

Every student who attends a university in Massachusetts will have resources provided to them on their respective campus.



Evaluation and Assessment Plan

Objectives

A rise in the number of students participating in campus activities across Massachusetts indicates a positive trend of students actively seeking connections—increased use of campus-provided resources to achieve self-help, showing that students are aware and trying to better themselves.

Evaluation Methods

Regularly Survey current students about their favorite extracurricular activities, frequency of event attendance, and overall engagement.

Observe foot traffic in common areas, cafeterias, libraries, and student centers. High traffic suggests active engagement and social interactions.

Keep records of student participation in campus events, workshops, and social gatherings. Compare attendance rates before and after implementing engagement initiatives.

Intended Outcomes

Foster stronger social bonds across colleges and universities in Massachusetts. We aim to ensure students do not struggle with loneliness and social isolation.

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