

# **“Coping with Crises” Climate/COVID Anxiety Campaign Case Study**

Spring 2020 | By Makayla Salas

## **Project Overview**

Originally this campaign was going to focus solely on coping with climate change, however, in being interrupted by COVID-19, we decided to expand the campaign’s scope to address coping with crises. We wanted to address the way that crises like climate change (or COVID-19) can severely impact people’s mental health, and provide resources and strategies for dealing with the feelings and thoughts it might bring up for people. We furthermore wanted to provide a sense of community by letting people know that they were not alone in their concerns about climate change, and in providing a safe space for them to participate in guided discussion about the concurrent crises.

## **Background**

Our original plan for this last campaign was to address the ways in which climate change impacts mental health. While we kept true to this theme, we broadened its scope to include all crises, in light of COVID-19. While many of our past campaigns have been focused on action-based sustainable steps that individuals can take to lessen their impact on the planet and better their relationship to the earth, we decided to try a different technique of campaign this time around by focusing on a less-discussed sustainability issue: mental health. We as Eco-Reps in particular know that being involved in environmental activism, or even just learning about the ways that the earth is being impacted by climate change, can be draining, discouraging, and otherwise difficult to process. We thought it was important to take a step back from our normal style of programming and address this equally important and impactful effect of climate change and other crises.

## **Goals**

Our two goals for this campaign were to inform people that they are in fact impacted by climate change, and to help provide a safe space and sense of community for them to process the feelings and thoughts that that realization inspired in them.

## **Implementation**

The UVM Eco-Reps program consists of 20 students that are divided up into five community teams, with each team assigned to a specified residential area on campus. Efforts included a campus wide intervention as well as smaller programming initiatives held in residential locations.

To equip the Eco-Reps with the relevant knowledge to tackle the concept of sustainable transportation, presentations were given by University of Vermont's Interfaith Center, LivingWell, Cami Davis (a Senior Lecturer who teaches in the Department of Art and Art History) Gioia Thompson (the Sustainability Director in UVM's Office of Sustainability), and Caylin McCamp (the Education and Outreach Coordinator for UVM's Office of Sustainability). Both the Interfaith Center and LivingWell provided information about how to lead discussions in a way that was conducive to vulnerability, Cami Davis provided information about the healing and educational components of environmental art, Gioia Thompson provided information about UVM's Climate Action Plan, and Caylin McCamp provided a presentation on her master's thesis, which focuses on the intersection of mental health and climate change.

- 1. Climate Film and Conversation Series:** Eco-Reps held weekly film screenings over Microsoft Teams, each with a different theme related to climate change (for example, Indigenous Activism). Each screening is followed by a guided discussion so that people can reflect on what feelings and thoughts came up for them during the screening, and feel a sense of community with the other people they share their concerns with.
- 2. Instagram Takeover:** Each week, a different community team was responsible for providing daily content for our Instagram page that aligned with both our campaign theme (coping with crises) and the theme of programming set by ResLife for the week (which could range from time management to radical self-care). This content always aimed to provide helpful tips and tricks for dealing with the unprecedented times we are experiencing currently due to COVID-19, and the unprecedented threat of climate change which we are experiencing all of the time.
- 3. Climate Feels Video:** To provide our community with a better sense of the general feelings of UVM students and staff regarding climate change, our video manager conducted and compiled 25 interviews into a short film. This film was shown at one of our climate film and conversation series nights and posted on our YouTube channel.
- 4. InstagramLIVE Events:** To continue interacting in small but regular ways with our community virtually, Eco-Reps held several InstagramLIVE screenings of things like hiking in the Spring, composting at home, or what it's like to live in a tiny house.
- 5. [Cynic Article:](#)** Because The Cynic ran an article that expressed concern about the lack of addressing climate change's impact on mental health, we felt it was pertinent to provide guest commentary about what we were doing with this campaign to address those concerns.

## **Timeline**

Weekly from 3/23 - 5/9

- Instagram Takeovers (x7)

Sundays 4/5 - 4/19

- InstagramLIVEs (x3)

Weekly 4/6 - 4/27

- Climate Film and Conversation Series (x5)

4/16

- Cynic article published

## **Financing**

\$428 was spent on stickers for this campaign. Unfortunately these were not able to be distributed due to COVID-19 necessitating that our programming and events were hosted virtually rather than in-person. Because these do not have branding on them that is specific to this time period, we will hopefully be able to use them in a future campaign so as to not waste materials. There was no cost to hosting any of our virtual programming.

## **Results**

In total, we made 5,330 impressions with this campaign, where 'impression' refers to any level of interaction a person had with the Eco-Reps program. This number is higher than average because in addition to counting virtual attendance at events, we used social media views, likes, comments and shares to measure engagement. For that reason, of these 5,330 impressions we only considered 346 of them to be highly engaged. A highly engaged impression refers to an impression that feels meaningful, productive, and likely to have a lasting impact.

Our internal rating of how these programs went averaged a 7, which is typical of internal feedback. This is positive, given that we had to completely transform our campaign to a virtual setting, which we had never done before.

Our Instagram Takeovers are something we might like to reproduce in the future in order to work more closely with the reshall's Learning Community goals. We are always

looking for ways to make our work relevant to Residential Life's work and create more overlap for partnerships, and Eco-Reps enjoyed being creative in making these posts.

A total of 120 people tuned into our three InstagramLIVE events, 35 of whom were highly-engaged. Our highest engagement was with the Tiny House tour.

A total of 68 people tuned into our Climate Film and Conversation series events, 35 of whom were considered highly-engaged, meaning that they participated in the discussion. Eco-Reps enjoyed providing this short weekly series in lieu of the larger film festival we were going to hold before in-person events were cancelled because of COVID-19. We may in the future offer more online streaming of videos and discussion forums, or provide virtual documentation of events held in person.

We will likely continue to write articles for The Cynic, as they get wide circulation in both print and online distribution, and create better visibility for UVM Eco-Reps' work.

## **Lessons Learned**

Adapting our campaign to a virtual platform certainly taught us that we are flexible and adaptable! We learned that there are some potential positives to virtual programming, and we may continue to offer some virtual events in the future. We believe that people who may not have shown up to an event (because they didn't have enough time, were nervous to show up, etc.) may have had an easier time accessing our events online (because they could leave early or show up late, didn't have to participate in person, etc.).

However, there were still certainly some drawbacks to using virtual programming. It was difficult to create a shared space and sense of community online. While this platform works okay for people who are already acquainted with each other, it is difficult to create a virtual space that helps people feel truly connected and safe to be vulnerable with strangers, which impeded our ability to get people to share about their feelings about climate change and COVID-19 as freely as we think we may have otherwise been able to accomplish.

If we were to repeat a climate campaign in the future, we may put more emphasis on demonstrating how climate change impacts us locally, rather than allowing the scope to be so broad as national or global. We think it is important to show people that climate change is not just something distant, but instead something personal.

Overall, we think that we did the best we could to provide outlets for people to process their feelings and thoughts about both climate change and COVID-19, given the circumstances of only being able to offer virtual programming.