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Bill of Rights: MyImpact Challenge
Project Report

1. The inspiration for the project

When I was younger, I began advocating and dismantling misconceptions about child disorders, driven by my brother Jon-Elliot, who has autism. He ignited my leadership qualities and passion. Jon-Elliot was diagnosed with Autism and Sensory Processing Disorder at two and is non-verbal. Observing my brother and parents navigate the education system made me realize the lack of accessible resources for individuals with autism. While my family was fortunate to provide Jon-Elliot with personalized education that emphasized his strengths and helped him overcome challenges, many families lacked such privileges. Seeing him struggle first hand struggles led me to establish SpectrumEYES.

The idea for my non-profit emerged last summer during my participation in Girls with Impact, an eight-week entrepreneurship academy. The program offered a finance, networking, marketing, and business fundamentals crash course. Based on the importance of sensory therapy in my upbringing, I aspired to create a functional product that would aid Autistic children in achieving meaningful developmental milestones while ensuring their safety and enjoyment. During my research, I discovered that many sensory kits available in the market contained toxic ingredients and potentially hazardous materials for individuals with autism. Moreover, the price tags on these kits were unaffordable for many families.

SpectrumEYES' mission, under the name Sensory Kits 4 Kids (SK4K), is to provide safe and non-toxic kits to individuals with autism who don't have access to these resources. Additionally, these kits were designed to raise awareness and understanding of autism and other sensory processing disorders. While growing up with a brother on the autism spectrum granted me unique insights. I recognized that not everyone had similar experiences, hindering their comprehension of the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities. Consequently, many people remain unaware of the complex realities faced by Autistic individuals and their families.

To complement the Sensory Kits 4 Kids, SpectrumEYES developed workbooks to educate elementary school children about autism, empowering and teaching them to become advocates themselves.

Through sensory kits, workbooks, and an upcoming documentary, SpectrumEYES strives to challenge outdated narratives surrounding autism while making educational resources more accessible and effective for individuals with autism and their families. At every step of this journey, my brother Jon-Elliot serves as my most significant source of inspiration.
2. The project plan

SpectrumEYES originated from establishing my non-profit organization, Sensory Kits 4 Kids, which directly resulted from my participation in Girls with Impact. Following the program's conclusion, I immediately transformed my digital prototype into a reality. While creating sensory kits, I dedicated countless hours to research, ensuring the inclusion of appropriate items. This presented a challenge since autism affects each individual differently. What may be a strength for my brother might be a weakness for others, creating a need for adaptable and inclusive kits suitable for all users. Once I finalized the kits' contents, I began fundraising to distribute them free of charge to families in need.

After securing initial funding, the kits entered production. Several weeks of communication with manufacturers led to their finalization, ready for testing and distribution. Alongside my brother and his friends, who served as primary reviewers, I contacted local schools and organizations to distribute the kits. The initial feedback from parents, children, educators, and professionals was gratifying. They expressed excitement about the kit contents and appreciated their non-toxic nature. Significantly, educators and parents reported that many children using the kits were achieving developmental milestones at an accelerated pace.

Creating a prototype for the sensory kits constituted the project's initial and most time-consuming phase. Designing the kits to cater to multiple audiences involved significant trial and error. I went through several boxes, grappling with issues like size, durability, and safety until I settled on biodegradable containers capable of accommodating all kit contents. Anticipating the kits' limited lifespan, I included a string bag that served both storage purposes and as a tool for spreading awareness.

Regarding the kit contents, I had numerous engaging options to choose from. However, finding non-toxic versions proved challenging. To address this, I conducted thorough market research and sought professional advice, including therapists working with Autistic children. To ensure ingredient safety, I began creating some items myself as a cost-saving measure. For instance, I made kinetic sand using cereal, so children wouldn't be exposed to toxic ingredients commonly found in traditional slimes and play dough even if ingested. Additionally, I developed my sensory dough and jelly, both possessing calming effects on individuals with sensory disorders. I sourced fidget spinners, stress balls, and pop tubes to complete the kits.

3. Details of the project's execution

In finalizing the kit contents, I tested each toy and rated them using a custom scale I created. The rating scale encompassed durability, attention span, cleanliness, and accessibility. This data
proved instrumental in pitch meetings with schools and organizations, showcasing the safety and efficacy of the kits as educational tools for students. Once the logistics were ironed out, I delivered my first donation of 50 Sensory Kits to the Brooklyn Autism Center, my brother's school. The kits were distributed to multiple classrooms, staff, and the board, enabling me to receive feedback and make necessary adjustments based on the specific needs of their children, thus expanding our reach. The positive response also facilitated further community funding and subsequent donations to families.

The sensory kits served as stepping stones to further avenues for impactful change. Recognizing that these kits, like many others my brother had used over the years, would be used and depleted within a week, I understood the need to provide enduring resources and educational materials to families and loved ones of Autistic children. Sensory Kits 4 Kids alone could not challenge societal perceptions of autism and dismantle ignorance. Thus, I transformed Sensory Kits 4 Kids into SpectrumEYES to align with my mission of meaningful education. In addition to sensory kits, SpectrumEYES introduced workbooks that promote inclusivity education among elementary and middle school students, fostering a deeper understanding of individuals on the Autism spectrum.

After developing the workbook curriculum, I collaborated with local NYC schools and organizations to host workshops. These workshops involved teaching the curriculum from the workbooks to elementary school children. Recognizing the absence of inclusivity training in many schools, I aimed to provide a hands-on method of instruction that would cultivate tolerance and awareness among young children. Building upon the success of these workshops, I aspire to organize a multi-day camp this summer, enabling us to reach a broader student audience and expand the curriculum in a memorable manner within our community.

Drawing from my experiences with my brother, I created five chapters: Understanding Autism, Sensory Processing Disorder, Emotions, and Understanding and Accepting Differences. These chapters presented clear explanations and real-world examples, making sensory processing disorders comprehensible for young children. In addition, I incorporated reflection prompts and interactive activities such as coloring pages and matching games. Upon completing the workbook's content, I self-published it through Amazon.

With the workbooks, I approached local NYC public school special education programs, successfully securing their collaboration in distributing the workbooks and hosting interactive workshops. These workshops involved presenting the workbook curriculum to students and sometimes their families. During these sessions, children engaged with the SpectrumEYES workbooks and participated in sensory activities alongside their friends, enhancing their interpersonal skills.

4. Project's Demonstrated Impact on the Community
Impact #1:

My non-profit organization recently distributed over 50 sensory play therapy kits to Autistic children and families at the Brooklyn Autism Center. These kits were thoughtfully designed to engage and stimulate the senses of these exceptional children. Feedback from parents and caregivers was overwhelmingly positive, validating the kits' significant impact on their lives. Every parent who completed our questionnaire expressed their child's excitement and captivation with the kit contents.

Surveys revealed that 65% of parents observed their children being able to sustain engagement with the kits for at least 10 minutes. This achievement holds significant importance as it reduces the tendency of elopement often experienced by Autistic children. By providing focused and engaging activities, we empowered parents to attend to other tasks, offering much-needed time and the ability to fulfill their responsibilities.

Parent insights guided us in introducing enhancements to the kits, such as including a satchel or string bag for easy travel and storage. We also developed different kit variations to cater to children with Pika, ensuring each child's safe and personalized experience. These improvements further amplified the impact of our sensory processing kits, making a difference in the lives of low-income families who otherwise lacked access to sensory play therapy.

We aim to distribute these enhanced kits to over 500 children at autism centers throughout NYC. By scaling up our efforts, we aim to extend our support and provide sensory development opportunities to as many children as possible, particularly those from low-income families who face challenges accessing such resources.

Impact #2:

In addition to the sensory kits, our SpectrumEYES workbooks have played a significant role in raising awareness about autism and promoting inclusivity. Chapters like "Emotions" and "Understanding Differences" have successfully educated elementary school children about sensory processing disorders. The interactive curriculum, reflection prompts, and engaging activities have enabled young readers to appreciate their unique abilities and those of their peers. Through partnerships with schools and community organizations, I have initiated meaningful dialogues about neurodiversity. By distributing free sensory process kits and workbooks, we provide critical tools for developing children from low-income families. This expands awareness within these communities and fosters valuable connections with partners who share our mission of promoting acceptance and support for individuals with autism and other sensory processing disorders.
Furthermore, my advocacy efforts within my school organization, ReelWorks, have promoted inclusivity. Through sharing my curriculum with others, I successfully advocated for opportunities for diverse students to create short films and established an inclusive space for neurodivergent students. This initiative ensures that individuals of all backgrounds and abilities have equal access to opportunities for self-expression and creativity.

5. Reflection on Civic Virtue, Communities, and Impact

Through developing the sensory kits and curriculum, I recognized no one-size-fits-all regarding autism. Each individual's diagnosis is unique and requires an equally unique approach. SpectrumEYES has enabled me to see the Autism spectrum from new perspectives outside of my own.

Through my in-person classes and distribution, I spent much time interacting with young kids who were on the spectrum and many that were not. These experiences allowed me to grow my teaching and leadership skills to connect with diverse skill sets and developmental abilities. In many ways, my curriculum started a ripple effect as I taught these young children how to create a more accepting environment, and they exposed me to new perspectives that aided in my personal growth. While everyone knows autism, not everyone understands its impact on the day-to-day lives of those around them.

Engaging with parents has provided valuable insights into Autism treatment across diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, I learned that the private school system often results in extended delays in receiving reimbursements from the state. Even before children can access quality private education, finding the right school can take years, considering the unique requirements associated with each diagnosis. Many parents also expressed the challenges of finding schools that do not require extensive financial sacrifices as they strive to avoid falling below the poverty line. This feedback, in particular, helped me recognize the magnitude of the issue surrounding Autism education and the lack of media attention it receives.

I hope to donate 500 kits and introduce our autism education curriculum to five city-wide summer programs by August 2023.

By promoting awareness, empathy, and community engagement, SpectrumEYES empowers students to contribute to a world where individuals on the Autism spectrum are not defined by their abilities but celebrated for their uniqueness.