

Understanding Stigma Toward Opioid Use Disorders and Harm Reduction Through Community- Driven Ethnographic Comics

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SUD and Stigma

- Substance use disorders (SUDs) are highly stigmatized conditions¹
- Stigma is one of the biggest barriers to recovery¹
- Effects of stigma:
 - Avoiding, delaying, or prematurely stopping treatment^{1, 2}
 - Riskier drug use, increased overdose^{1,2}
 - Emotional distress³
 - Housing discrimination, homelessness^{3,4}



Harm Reduction

- A set of evidence-based strategies aimed at reducing negative consequences of drug use⁵
- A social justice movement built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs⁵
- Strategies try to “meet people where they’re at” ⁵
 - Syringe distribution
 - Overdose education and naloxone distribution
 - Medications for addiction treatment (MAT)

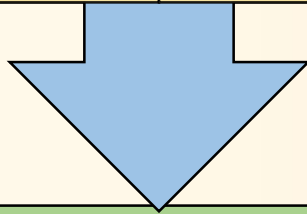


How to Reduce SUD Stigma

Some evidence shows that education may reduce stigma⁶

Contact-based
education⁶

Critical reflection
opportunities⁶



Comics act as an example of contact-based education with an emphasis on reflection on stigmatizing attitudes⁷



Why Comics?



Accessible to a broad audience beyond academia⁷



Images provide context and facilitate human connection⁷



This connection can bring awareness to stigmatizing beliefs about people with SUD⁷



Intervention Objective

Create comics based on real-life stories to reduce stigma around OUD and harm reduction

Humanize people who use drugs

Engage readers in a process of co-imagination that allows them to see and feel the subject's experience



Intervention Development Methods

Narratives were collected in Utah and New Mexico between 2018 and 2021

One-hour semi-structured qualitative interviews

Interviews were audio and/or video recorded and transcribed

“Community scholars” played active role in development of the comics



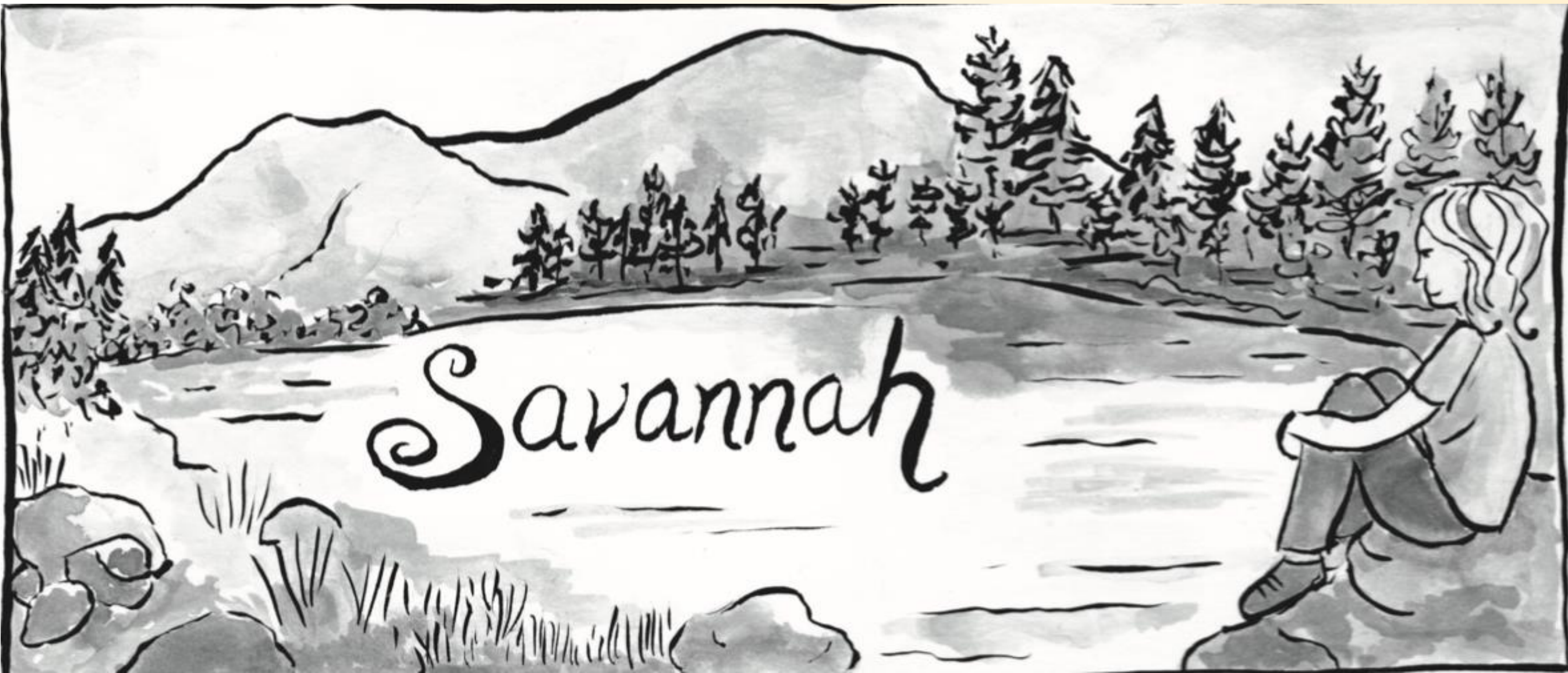
Final Intervention

31 interviews
collected

4 selected for
first graphic
novel

Two-volume
series in
development





Comic Example: Meet Savannah



I WISH MY DOCTOR HAD
TALKED TO ME ABOUT
TREATMENT MEDICATIONS



LIKE METHADONE
OR BUPRENORPHINE.
THESE MEDICATIONS
ARE ALSO OPIOIDS,
BUT ARE LONG-
ACTING AND
HELP PEOPLE
WITH OPIOID
USE DISORDER
TO MANAGE
WITHDRAWAL
AND STOP USING
OTHER OPIOIDS.





SOME WORDS PEOPLE USE TO TALK ABOUT DRUG USE
CAN CAUSE A LOT OF HARM. THESE WORDS ARE DEHUMANIZING.



"ADDICT" "JUNKIE" "TWEAKER" "CRACKHEAD" "DRUGGIE" "DOPER"



Future Research: Evaluating the Intervention

Collect mixed methods data on how the comics affect stigmatizing attitudes among the general public

Surveys at community reading groups in Utah and New Mexico



Conclusion

This intervention development project shows how academic researchers can partner with marginalized community members to co-create graphic novels that may reduce stigma

Addressing stigma among the general public may improve health and access to treatment and harm reduction services among people with SUDs



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Questions & Comments

