



International Journal of Design for Social Change, Sustainable Innovation and Entrepreneurship

<https://www.designforsocialchange.org/journal/index.php/DISCERN-J>

ISSN 2184-6995

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Published online: November 2022

To cite this article:

Andrew, I. (2022). Designing a value object for perpetrators of domestic violence. *Discern: International Journal of Design for Social Change, Sustainable Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 3(2), 1-14.

Designing a value object for perpetrators of domestic violence

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Abstract

This article focuses on a group of people who do not have a voice in everyday discourse – perpetrators of domestic violence. By engaging with qualitative design methods, including the Double Diamond design process, and looking at the system of interactions and experiences at Stopping Violence Dunedin (SVD), this research identified a series of themes and milestones for men who are perpetrators of domestic violence, leading to the development of a value object. A value object can refer to that which creates value for the user. In this case, the object is a key that created a value proposition, working to celebrate the milestones that these men reach in their journey of change, supporting the possibility of an alternative future for them – a future without violence.

Keywords: Human-centred design, User journey mapping, Double Diamond, Value object, Perpetrators of domestic violence

Introduction

The author's Master of Design Research started in 2019 and continued through to 2021 while the world experienced the coronavirus pandemic. During the pandemic, there was evidence of increased domestic violence in our communities. The New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse found that 9% of New Zealanders who completed an online survey reported that they had experienced some form of family harm during lockdown (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2020). The United Nations described the worldwide increase in domestic violence as a 'shadow pandemic' alongside Covid-19 (Mohan, 2020).

The statistics for domestic violence are high in New Zealand. According to the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse's 2017 statistics, 35% of New Zealand women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime. This statistic reaches 55% when psychological abuse is included. Research indicates that domestic violence affects every ethnicity in New Zealand, although some groups are at higher risk than others. A survey of women found that the lifetime prevalence of physical and/or IPV was 1 in 2 for Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand) women (58%) and 1 in 3 for European/other women (34%) and Pacific women (32%) (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, n.d.). From 2009 to 2017, 230 family violence deaths were recorded in New Zealand, of which 48% were a result of IPV (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2020).

Family violence and perpetration of domestic violence are complicated issues. Research on perpetrators of domestic violence indicates that primary preventative measures, long-term investment and the need to develop a holistic approach that incorporates support from more than just the justice system are considered critical for reducing the incidence of domestic violence (Polaschek, 2016). It is also well known that perpetrators of domestic violence are often victims themselves, having experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse or other types of traumas in their own lives (Baker, 2013; Campbell, 2012; Roguski & Gregory, 2014; Snegirev, 2017).

Stopping Violence Dunedin (SVD) is a not-for-profit community group that works with men by offering individual and group therapy that offers positive change. SVD works with about 800 men per year who have a history of violence and supports them by listening to personal narratives and building trust and connections within group sessions. The SVD manager explained that the support developed in these sessions is a vital component in the men's journey as well as the opportunity for change and hope for a life without violence. The manager was concerned about the drop-off rates of the men and expressed an interest in seeing if this support could be extended to them in some way during the week when they are away from SVD. This support, and the skills they learn at SVD, are critical while the men deal with the everyday stresses of life.

Methodology

Human-centred design (HCD) and qualitative design methods underpinned by the Double Diamond design process were used to determine whether design could support the transformation of violent male offenders within SVD. The Double Diamond process is a non-linear design method which explores needs, ideas and opportunities by using a discover, define, develop and deliver approach. The two-diamond approach works through a process of deep discovery using divergent thinking, followed by focused action (IDEO, n.d.). The four cores of the Double Diamond principles are research, insight, ideation and prototyping.

The very nature of HCD is to generate an understanding of a user group or community and reach a variety of solutions for an issue using specific qualitative design methodologies. According to Crouch and Pearce (2012), the key intention of qualitative research is to provide a vehicle through which participants' voices can be heard. As a generative process, it keeps the user firmly in scope, seeking to arrive at solutions to a particular issue that are both feasible and desirable, with a bias towards action (Clarkson, 2015). It is only by engaging in a thorough process of HCD that a researcher can fully understand the community within which they are working and strive to create an innovative solution which is specific and contextual. In this research, HCD methods which originated from sociological practice (expert interviews and focus groups) were used alongside design methods such as user journey mapping, sketching and reflection to develop a design intervention point and prototype ideas.

Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis

The 14 interview questions for the four SVD facilitators were based on a face-to-face, open-ended, semi-structured method, which worked as a framing device to open up new possibilities during the conversations with the interviewees (Crouch and Pearce, 2012). The interview questions in this study covered both how the facilitators see their role in the SVD group sessions and what they think is important for the men as they begin to face the process of change. This method was employed by Roguski and Gregory (2014), who completed semi-structured interviews with former violent perpetrators to ensure that their voices and stories were the central focus of the study. The data from the interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, which can highlight similarities and differences resulting in unanticipated insights (Nowell et al., 2017). Metzger and Woodley (2010), in their report about family violence and seeking help, also used iterative data analysis, which allowed themes and patterns to emerge.

User Journey Mapping

User journey mapping is a common practice in design, allowing the creation of a visual timeline of the user's thoughts and emotions when using a new object or design and creating a visualisation of the process that a person goes through (Gibbons, 2018). Journey mapping can also isolate any moments of destabilization in the process and lead to a design intervention point that can introduce an improvement

or a new design idea. In this research, the journey of change for the men at SVD was visualised using the monomyth of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949). This draws from Joseph Campbell's extensive analysis of human mythology, identifying a series of archetypal stages that are common across cultures in myths, fairy tales, dreams, books and films (Yuille, 2017). Campbell's narrative structure can be applied to design to ensure that the user has an experience (or a journey), if not an actual hero's experience. In this instance, the themes identified as part of the interviews and thematic analysis and information from a literature review were mapped onto Campbell's hero's journey to visualise a design intervention point.

Focus Groups

Two sets of focus groups were completed. The first with the SVD facilitators was undertaken to gain feedback about the identified themes, milestones and the prototype idea. The focus group with two SVD group members was conducted to gain insight into the milestones and the design prototype.

Results

Double Diamond design process - Discover phase

The open-ended, semi-structured interview questions allowed the SVD facilitators (#1 to #4) to reflect on their experience with men who may be initially reticent to the idea of a life without violence but who, over time, develop new skills and an understanding that allow them to make positive choices. In this co-construction of knowledge between interviewer and interviewee, a shared understanding was developed throughout the interactions (Hollingsworth and Dybdahl, 2007).

The constructed narratives gained from the interview transcripts were analysed by comparing each interviewee's answers to establish themes and patterns through iterative thematic content analysis. These themes were added to a table under the interviewee's name, and if a common theme surfaced, this was considered relevant and given a number. These themes were then compared with other academic research (including research by the SVD facilitators themselves) and details of these were also added to the tables. When the data from the themes were tallied, any theme that had a total of 10 or more references was considered relevant to this study (Table 1). Overall, seven common themes were identified by the facilitators and from research on men who undertake the journey towards a life of non-violence.

Table 1: Seven common themes for perpetrators of domestic violence.

| Themes | |
|--------|--|
| 1. | Men share, listen and tell stories |
| 2. | The group process helps to develop authentic relationships and connections |
| 3. | Mentors offer model behaviour and hope for the new men |
| 4. | The men develop self-awareness, which in turn raises consciousness |
| 5. | Children are an important motivation for change |
| 6. | Cultural connectiveness is important to support positive transformation |
| 7. | There is an overall journey of transformation that occurs for men at SVD |

Men share, listen and tell stories

Telling personal stories during group sessions is an essential element in the journey of change for perpetrators of domestic violence. This can be an emotionally painful experience but ultimately leads to an awareness that other men share the same or related stories. Facilitator #1 acknowledged the pain that the

men bring to SVD but also the bravery. She sees this in the men when they tell their stories but also in the courage of other men who can be present with that emotional pain in the room. Facilitator #3 also referred to stories told during group sessions. He said:

“They learn from each other. They will hear each other’s stories. They will get a better hearing in general. They’ll get a better understanding of the world. Their horizons will broaden. Their sense of who they are in the world will change, and, as a consequence, their behaviour and their approach to many situations will change”.

This sharing of stories is only possible by relationship building which led to the second theme.

The group process helps to develop authentic relationships and connections

In the interview with Facilitator #3, he remarked that the group works to challenge several ideas, including those that support violence as well as a hopeless view of the world. The group works by connecting and developing hope that change is possible. The facilitators reported that men who tell the group that they had failed in some way during the week (e.g. shouted at a partner, child or workmate) usually speak with some relief, rather than a sense of fear. This is due in part to the empathy that is modelled in the group situation and the new ability to think outside just yourself. Facilitator #4 also highlighted the men’s need to be seen. The facilitators make sure that everyone is seen for who they are in the group, even if that is initially uncomfortable. Peers or mentors, men who have been through similar experiences, are crucial to this process which led to the third theme.

Mentors offer model behaviour and hope for the new men

Facilitator #1 spoke about the importance of mentors and their presence in the group. These are men who have attended SVD for several months and are familiar with the process. Their presence indicates that the process at SVD works if you stick to it. Facilitator #1 said:

“So, I think the mentor’s role is to offer hope. Change is possible. Just by existing and being there and being able to say, ‘I used to be this and now I’m this’. And that this works”.

Facilitator #3 said that he believes that the men who have been going to SVD for some time model good behaviour in terms of dealing with the many situations that the world throws at them. This model behaviour is eventually enfolded by the new men, helping to shape a new identity. He said,

“What changes is the identity of the people we’re talking with. People change who they believe themselves to be”.

This change of identity can also occur with self-awareness and the fourth theme in this research.

The men develop self-awareness, which in turn raises consciousness

Facilitator #4 mentioned that men can undergo change and let go of their current violent identity, which she referred to as a raising of consciousness. The men notice their feelings in a situation but also notice other peoples’ reactions. Facilitator #2 also talked about group members who are constantly disappointed by their behaviour, which can send them into a cycle of old unpleasant habits. The facilitators constantly tend to those behaviours during the group and work on developing new, positive ones. She said:

“They are disappointed with themselves, and they can sit with the discomfort of that because that then becomes the new motivator to try harder, while at the same time not beat themselves up about it because that just goes back to the old punitive model”.

Making changes to one’s personality is complicated, but there can be many motivators for change, including children, which led to theme five.

Children are an important motivation for change

Facilitator #3 pointed out that the men who come to SVD essentially just want peaceful lives. They want to be able to work, save some money, get some assets and look after their children. Their motives for change are ordinary, but believing that change is an option can be challenging. Facilitator #4 pointed out in her interview that although children were a good motivator for change, change for the individual first was more important. She said:

“Often there comes a shift somewhere along the line and it becomes something they realise – actually it’s not about anybody else. ‘It’s nice that I’m doing this for my kid but I have to do it for me first’. But that’s a process”.

A way of supporting positive transformation can also be guided by cultural connectiveness.

Cultural connectiveness is important to support positive transformation

All the facilitators spoke of the importance of connections (*whakawhanaungatanga*) in the group. Whakawhanaungatanga is a Māori word that loosely translates as relationship building and family connections. Facilitator #1 said that it is continually about connecting and treating everyone who comes through the door like a long-lost family member. In response to a question about this connectiveness, Facilitator #2 also said:

“We value those differences instead of insisting that we have the same understanding or the same set of values or whatever. We show a willingness to understand, be open to, be curious and have an openness to the cultural values and the cultural norms that other people have grown up with. That’s important”.

It may be that connection to one’s own culture is a new experience, and this is part of a journey of change that leads to the last theme identified in this research.

There is an overall journey of transformation that occurs for men at SVD. Facilitators #1, 2 and 4 all reiterated the idea in the groups that “we are all in this together” and “we are all a work in progress”, highlighting to the men that change is possible with support. There is a lot of vulnerability and pain in the group that is so important for the process. Facilitator #1 remarked that some of the men have experienced unbelievable trauma in their lives, and in many ways they are only duplicating what they have learnt growing up. The transformation that the men undergo was also a reason that Facilitator #2 came to work every day. She said:

“I think it is the magic of transformation. When you see changes happening [...]. You know when someone turns up and they’ve been hiding under a hood for months and the hood comes down. What might look like a surface change [...] represents something much bigger. There is something very persuasive about that level of change”.

Double Diamond – Define phase

User Journey Mapping

With the identification of themes, it was then possible to complete a journey map for the SVD men, specifically using the monomyth of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949). Lupton (2017) in her book *Design is Storytelling* discusses Campbell's ubiquitous concept of the circular journey where the hero gets a call to adventure, initially refuses the call, but, with the help of a sidekick, embarks on a journey of tests and rewards, resulting in returning home with a hero's story. Although the hero's journey is not typically found in HCD, it made sense here to relate the hero to men at SVD and the sidekick to their potential mentor. The importance of the relationship between mentors and new men at SVD has already been identified in the themes above. As Lupton (2017) also identified, the circular pattern of the hero's journey is useful in design, as the user goes through a series of highs and lows and their relationship with an object changes over time.

The mapping of experiences of new clients at SVD identified a point of design intervention where the men go through trials and failures in their journey of change (Figure 1). Through trials and failures, this part of the journey prompts personal growth by developing new skills and raising consciousness and self-awareness, and the hero can accept help from their mentor along the way. In the seven themes identified above, the mentor at SVD proved to be fundamental to the journey of change, as they display a 'been there done that' narrative and are visible proof that the SVD group process works if you stick to it. The hero in this instance can cross the threshold with the mentor's help and move through the rest of the journey towards change. This can include revelation (reviewing old behaviours that do not work anymore), change (being more compassionate with oneself), atonement and return with a changed identity.

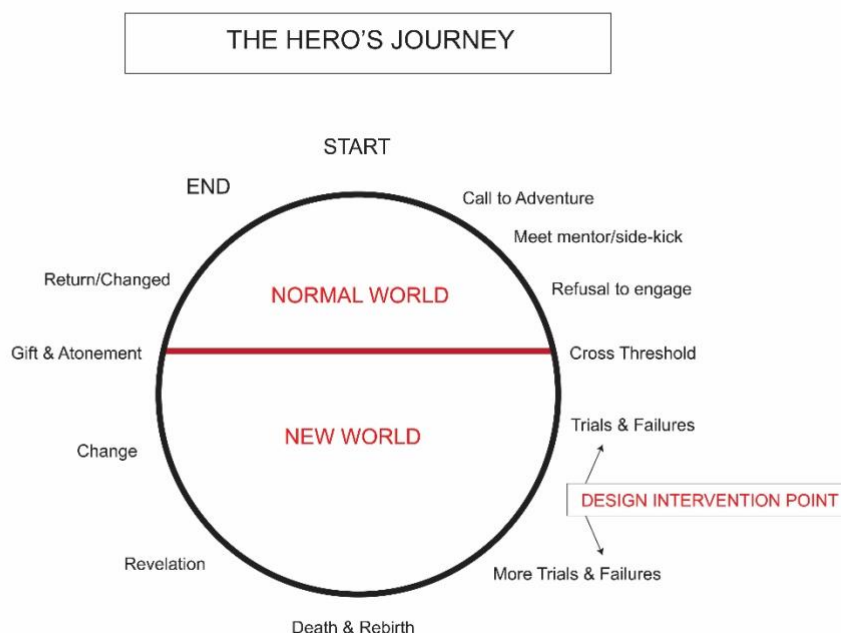


Figure 1: The hero's journey for perpetrators of domestic violence (adapted from Campbell, 2008).

Milestones

Upon further reflection and consideration of the journey metaphor, as well as the idea of transformation, seven milestones were identified, which were later approved by the SVD facilitators during the focus group

session (Figure 2). Milestones can form an essential element of the journey mapping process, in which a series of actions drives the customer on a particular journey. “Action drives stories and it also drives the design process” (Lupton, 2017, p. 21). What Lupton means by this is that good design creates an unfolding story which works to create connections and memories for the user.

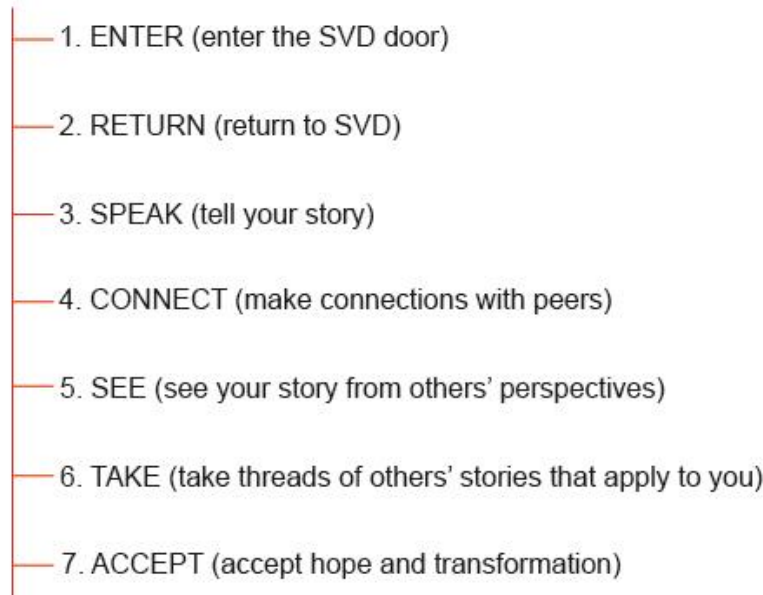


Figure 2: Milestones for Stopping Violence Dunedin (SVD) men.

Storytelling continues to be a strong focus from the research, the interview data and the stories that come from the men at SVD. Authentic storytelling was also important in the analysis of responses to New Zealand It's Not OK Campaign, a recent multi-year campaign to raise awareness about domestic violence. Point Research Ltd. (2010) found that the use of 'real people telling real stories of domestic violence' reverberated more with viewers than using actors in advertising. In this instance, the story of the new client at SVD, now that it is translated into actions (or milestones), could be further explored towards an engaging and accessible design solution.

Double Diamond – Develop phase

Prototype development

The design of an object that the men could carry with them could act as a reminder of their journey of transformation towards non-violence as well as a particular milestone that they might have overcome. Initially thinking about what men carry in their pockets – a wallet, cell phone and keys, the key as an object is a useful metaphor for a journey but also carries many other meanings. For example, a key:

- Opens and closes doors (both physical and metaphorical)
- Is often lost and found again
- Initiates new beginnings
- Opens hearts
- Solves mysteries
- Unlocks potential

Keys are familiar items that protect safe spaces but can also metaphorically offer new experiences and hope. The familiarity aspect opens possibilities for the user and its potential to introduce a new and better future. In this case, the key could remind the men of the journey they were on, as well as their support network at SVD. Therefore, a further concept was to make a pattern on the key (relating to a particular milestone) that was tactile in some way. This idea fitted with the concept of the value object but required feedback from the facilitators at SVD.

Focus Group (SVD Facilitators)

A focus group with three facilitators was held to gain feedback about the design process to date - the themes, milestones and key idea as a value object. During the discussion with the facilitators, the idea of the key was attractive. However, in their opinion, not every group member should be given a gift of this kind, as some attended SVD merely to fulfil a court order. It was common for some men to attend the group sessions, not engage in the process and leave when the 26 weeks were completed. They also thought that seven milestone keys were too many and that it would be difficult to pinpoint when those turning points might be reached. Facilitator #1 felt that a key would be better presented when the facilitators see a 'shift' in a group member. This engagement (shift), where an understanding develops of the consequences of their violent actions, usually happens around the 4–6-week mark. It was also suggested that a second key could be presented to any of the men who become mentors. This is currently a casual process at SVD, but it is a considerable achievement when men in the groups start to show leadership and help new men to find their way.

Key design

Once the value object was determined, the process began with the design of the key and its associated pattern. The pattern on the key was important as both a memory enabler and a reminder of the milestones that the user had achieved, as well as the support of the group. Humans rely on both sight and touch to evoke memory, but this rumination can also work to develop new understandings of past mistakes. Designed objects, although seemingly inauthentic, can work to change behaviour in the holder, or at least induce a cognitive process. The men could reach for the key in their pocket during times of stress. The idea for the pattern of the first key came specifically from the word 'shift', which Facilitator #1 had identified in the focus group. The car shift diagram was a natural fit in terms of the metaphoric value of journeys as well as its connection with a 'shift' in behaviour. The shift diagram also indicates a succession of stages, going from first to second to third, etc. The second mentor key was based around the adjectives for the word 'key' (main, major, crucial etc) and the word 'mentor', which led to 'protector', in turn leading to 'manhole cover'. The idea of the manhole cover is that it protects without being visible and is both strong and secure, as well as being inconspicuous (much like a mentor).

There were a series of designs for creating the key, but the final prototype was created by developing a medium density fibreboard (MDF) mould, which was cast in brass by a local casting foundry. The mould was created by designing a key shape and the patterns in Adobe Illustrator and cutting these out using a LaserJet. The 'shift' and 'manhole cover' patterns on the mould were also raised by rasterising (removing) the surface of the pattern, ensuring a 3D-like tactile effect. Image 1 shows the MDF mould of the Mentor key with its associated 'manhole cover' pattern, and Image 2 shows the final prototype of the Shift key, cast in brass.



Image 1: MDF prototype manhole cover key.



Image 2: Final prototype Shift key, cast from brass.

Double Diamond – Deliver phase

Focus Group (SVD Group Members)

The purpose of the focus group with two SVD members (#A and #B) was to gain their perspective on the seven milestones identified from the research, as well as feedback on the key concept as incentives for men at SVD. This session was based on the premise that these men were familiar with each other, as they had been in a group for several months. This level of comfort was important for the results of the focus group, which the researcher saw as a simulation of a social occasion rather than a formal interview (Lunt, 1996). The plan for this focus group was to keep it as open-ended as possible for the participants to feel comfortable interjecting as much as they wanted. The following is a summary of the conversation, including some key statements from the two participants.

The two group members generally agreed with the milestones that had been developed but had differing views about the order in which they occurred. They also acknowledged that the milestones could come at different times and in different orders depending on the person. It also became clear during the conversation that people might revisit the milestones at different points of the journey. They were not necessarily a 'one-time' thing.

There were many layers to the Speak (Tell your story) milestone. #A said that he heard his own story told by someone else at the first group session he attended, which affected him deeply. It was not his story, but he realised then that other people had similar stories to him. It had, however, taken him longer to learn to listen to other peoples' stories. For him, the 'Return to SVD' milestone was determined by that initial experience, and he returned the next week without question. #B, however, said that it took years before he was able to return to SVD, as he was emotionally triggered by other group members in the first session he attended and did not go back. He also acknowledged that 'Telling your Story' is one thing but taking responsibility for it is another process altogether. When we discussed the milestone 'Accepting Hope', they both agreed that it takes varying amounts of time depending on the person, and it can be triggered with

certain realisations. These could be, for example, recognizing that you have the power to change, becoming self-aware and identifying what your issues are.

Another theme, 'Playing the Long Game', came up during the conversation, which is important to raise here. As mentioned previously, certain men attend SVD for the court-ordered 26 weeks and do not return (having not engaged in the process). Both participants had been attending SVD group sessions for more than two years and were adamant that the journey of change was lifelong. #B explained that many of the guys are very impatient, want instant gratification and find it hard to see the big picture. He echoed later that coming to SVD "is a lifelong thing and it's a lifestyle change. It's not a change of behaviour as such". #A also said about the group sessions, "That's what I do on a Wednesday. These are my guys. I'm a lifer".

The concept of the key was initiated by talking about what people have in their pockets. What do they carry with them that is part of their identity? When #A and #B were asked about what a key could represent for them, the discussion focused on opportunities, keeping and unlocking secrets, as well as safety. Losing your key can also create a source of anxiety. When they saw the Shift key with the gearshift pattern, the overall response was positive, with #B even comparing it to Alcoholics Anonymous sobriety chips. He also commented that the 'reverse' of the gearshift pattern was realistic, since the journey towards non-violence frequently consisted of 'two steps forward, one step back'. He also commented that there was a lot of 'neutral' or procrastinating in the process. They both agreed that a good time to give out the key was when a group member started to show a shift in attitude. #B mentioned that this can be a huge turning point when someone takes ownership of their violent behaviour.

The Manhole Cover key was also well received, with the concept of this key being for a mentor who had moved into a space where he could start to show leadership to the other, newer members of the group. #A agreed that you do not notice manhole covers until they're missing. They also concurred with the supposition that the key was suitable in the way that it is not obvious to anyone but the owner (#B mentioned early in the conversation that there is a lot of stigma and shame around attending SVD). #B also said that the manhole cover was like safety, and by the time you received, it you knew that there were a few people who definitely "had your back". He reiterated that at SVD, it is about pain management, not anger management, alluding to the support that is built within the group.

Discussion

Frascara (2006) believes that we must stop thinking about design as the construction of graphics, products or services but as a means for people to act. In this research, a design solution was sought to remind men of the process and the support they receive at SVD. Qualitative design methods and the Double Diamond design process were applied to investigate processes at SVD and explore concepts and opportunities which resulted in ideas about journeys and change. This translated to the development of a value object, the Key. A value object is that which can influence possible or definite change, and a design artefact can create a shared language and understanding as well as imagine a new future (Zino et al., 2021). Through the development of themes and milestones at SVD, the value object displayed a message, defined by either the Shift or the Manhole Cover patterns. The idea of the value object was to ensure that the user experiences something and ultimately, has an emotion induced that might evoke a change (in this case, a response to a situation with something other than violence). This builds on Fuad-Luke's (2009) definition of design exploration where we can explore possibilities outside current paradigms. A value object can present a proposition and reveal a positive alternative.

We all navigate our world according to our context and our identity (which changes over time), and we keep, carry and wear objects with us that either represent our identity or someone we might hope to be. According to Lupton (2002), we rely on the world of things, using objects to survive and conquer, merging our identities with the objects we carry. Most of us, for example, carry a mobile phone with us, which helps us to access and share information (which evokes certain emotions), and we can feel lost without it.

Objects that we keep at home either have a functional or emotive value (or both), and we are affected in some way if they are lost or broken. These objects sometimes tell a story and can communicate to us in certain ways. The keys, in this case, are a recognition of the work that has been put in but also a reminder of the support that has grown around the men at SVD. Just as a key is a metaphor for opening new doors, these keys are a start to a transformation – an alternative future where men can be in charge of their destiny.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the staff at Stopping Violence Dunedin (SVD), particularly the manager, for helping me with this research. I am grateful for their time and expertise in helping me to understand the process and journeys of men at SVD. I would also like to thank the two men who attended the focus group. I will never forget their openness and honesty about their lives.

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