

DESIGNING Healthy Communities



Design Thinking

for a Better World



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Contents

Designing Healthy Communities	4
The Design-thinking Process	6
Empathize	8
Define	10
Ideate	12
Prototype	14
Test	16
Reflect	18
PROJECT ➔ Need for Active Living	20
CASE Prolonged Sitting and Screen Time	22
CASE Fitness Programs for Every Body	23
CASE Not Enough Space for Physical Activity at School	25
DESIGN THINKING IN PRACTICE Being More Active	26
PROJECT ➔ Need for Healthy Food	28
CASE Access to Food in Local Communities	30
CASE Healthy Snack Options for Diabetic Students	31
CASE Hunger in Nepal	32
DESIGN THINKING IN PRACTICE Accessing Healthy Food	34
PROJECT ➔ Need for Clean Water	36
CASE Access to Clean Water at Shoal Lake 40 First Nation	38
CASE The Flint Water Crisis	39
CASE Need for Clean Water in Rwanda	41
DESIGN THINKING IN PRACTICE Accessing Clean Water	42
What's Next for Designing Healthy Communities?	44
Learning More	45
Bibliography	45
Glossary	47
Index	48
About the Author	48

Designing Healthy Communities

The Buzz about Design Thinking

People are using design thinking to improve lives and solve big problems around the world. Students have used design thinking to discover wonderful community solutions. For example, a design thinker who wants to encourage healthy living might create special exercise programs to get kids active at school. Design thinking offers limitless possibilities.

What Is Design Thinking?

Design thinking is a step-by-step **process** that helps designers solve problems. It inspires collaboration with others to find solutions, and active participation within our communities. To participate means to be involved in something. Design thinkers actively participate within a community to create solutions. At the center of design thinking is empathy, which is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. In design thinking, we use empathy to understand the user's specific challenges, thoughts, and needs.



Who Is the User?

The **user** is the person or the group of people with a problem or need. A user could be a middle-school student with **diabetes** who needs better school lunch options. The user could also be a group of people, such as the survivors of a hurricane who require access to clean water and food.

How Design Thinkers Work

Through research, interviewing, and listening to the users, design thinkers develop a deep understanding of the users' challenges and their needs. Empathy is the driving force behind design thinking. Guided by empathy, design thinkers collaborate with the user to work through steps toward a solution. These steps involve trial and error. Mistakes are part of the creative process, and they often lead to better solutions.

WE Charity and Clean Water in Communities

Craig and Marc Kielburger, the founders of WE Charity, use empathy to help improve the lives of people in communities around the world. They learn about the communities' needs, then work in partnership with those communities to create long-term solutions.

In 2010, team members at the WE Charity went to the community of Dos Palais in Haiti to understand the needs of the people there. WE team members talked with the community members and asked questions about their needs. They learned that the elementary school was old and falling apart. The classrooms were leaky and overcrowded, and the teachers had few school supplies. It was hard for children to learn in these conditions. There were also many new students coming to the school after the major earthquake in 2010 destroyed over 4,000 other schools in Haiti, making the classrooms even more overcrowded. With this understanding, WE worked with the community to build a new elementary school for the children of Dos Palais and the others who had come after the earthquake. They also equipped, or provided, the school with supplies.

Haiti is the poorest country in the **Western Hemisphere** and most Haitians live in extreme poverty. In Dos Palais, most community members do not have jobs and have no way to earn money. To also help solve this problem, the WE team hired local workers to build the schools. Because the WE team used empathy to understand the different needs of the Dos Palais community, they were able to create a solution that could help its many members.

In Dos Palais, each part of the school is painted a different color. When students were asked what color they would like to paint the school, each grade chose a different color of the rainbow!



The Kielburger brothers attend WE Day events in many cities. This special event inspires young people to become change-makers in their community and around the world.



The Design-thinking Process

The design-thinking process is a set of steps that support creative problem solving. There are different versions of the process, but all of them start with empathy and putting the user's needs first. In this book, you will follow these steps to develop user-centered solutions.

We explore this process throughout the book to help you be a design thinker. The steps are iterative. This means they are repeated many times until a solution is found.



What Is a Community?

A community is a group of people who live, work, and play in a place. In a healthy community, people have access to the things they need to keep their bodies and minds in good health, including exercise, food, and clean water.

Some people face challenges in their communities that put their health at risk. For example, natural disasters such as hurricanes and flooding can block people's access to safe food and water. A lack of space or programing can make it difficult for people to stay fit and active. Design thinking can create solutions to these problems.



In a healthy **community**, everyone has access to plenty of fresh, whole foods. Communities in **remote places** often do not have the same access to a **variety** of foods that people in populated places do. They may have to grow their own food or rely on buying unhealthy, processed food.

This book features case studies about barriers that interfere with people's ability to live healthily. By using the design-thinking steps, you will be able to understand the needs of people and work toward solutions.



Mindset Tips

- Stay Open** When working in a group, keep an open mind about the ideas of others.
- Dig Deeper** If you don't understand something a group member is trying to say, ask questions.
- Take Turns** Let all members of the group have a chance to share ideas and ask questions.
- Share** Think about and share your own memories and experiences to relate to ideas and get around roadblocks during the design-thinking process.
- Pace It** Keep track of the time during every aspect of the process.

Empathize

What Is Empathy?

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Building empathy is the most important step in design thinking. When users share their points of view, design thinkers can gain a deeper understanding of the users' needs. Design thinkers try to understand a user's experiences and imagine what it's like to live in the user's world.



Design thinkers can build empathy for their user by engaging with them: asking questions, seeking answers, and listening.

How Do We Build Empathy?

Design thinkers use different strategies to build empathy. Sometimes, design thinkers can get to know users by visiting them in their community. Other times, design thinkers do research to learn about a user they cannot meet in person. Some strategies to help you practice empathy include:

- **Immerse** yourself in the user's life through their own words, photos, or recordings.
- **Engage** by asking questions, seeking answers, and listening.
- **Observe** by taking a step back to watch, take in, and think.



Engaging to Build Empathy

Before you meet with the user or begin your research, write down as many questions as you can. Put your best questions in an order that makes sense, grouping related questions together.

Possible questions might include:

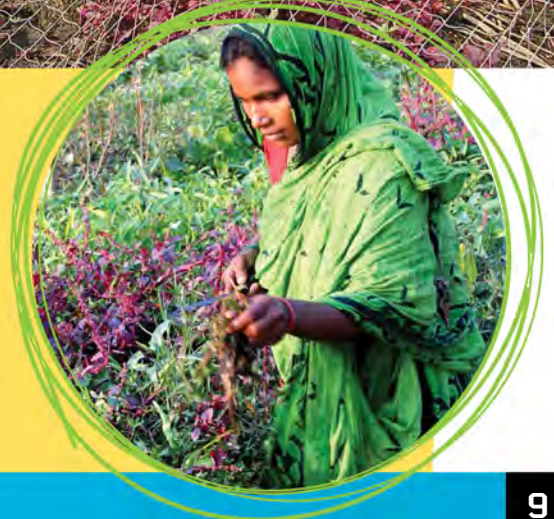
- Can you tell me about the healthy choices you make in your life?
- What healthy choices do you want to make?
- What challenges or barriers do you face when making healthy choices?
- Why do you think these barriers exist?
- How does this problem make you feel?
- What are some solutions that you have thought about?

Practical Action in Bangladesh

Innovators at an organization called Practical Action used empathy to help people living in poverty in the country of Bangladesh. First, they learned how flooding in agricultural communities caused food shortages. They understood that flooded land meant that people could not grow the food they needed to survive. With the needs of these people in mind, Practical Action designed floating gardens to help solve the problem. Now, people can grow food on flooded land. Practical Action worked directly with the people of Bangladesh, putting their needs at the heart of the solution.



These floating gardens are a user-centered solution to the problem of flooded farmland in Bangladesh.



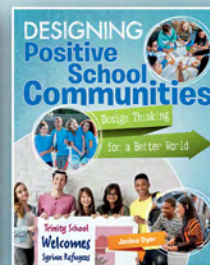


Become a change maker in your community through design thinking! Design thinkers are problem solvers who try to understand a problem from the perspective of the person experiencing it. This guiding principle leads to solutions that fit the user best, not the designer. The design-thinking process inspires empathy, collaboration, and innovative thinking. Each title in this unique series features case studies related to social change and engaging hands-on learning.

Designing Healthy Communities

Communities can do much to inspire healthy lifestyles. This introduction to the design-thinking process shows how to create practices in your community that inspire people to be active and make healthy food choices. Finding ways to make these options accessible to everyone can also lead to solutions to big issues—such as access to clean drinking water in impoverished communities.

TITLES IN THIS SERIES



Guided Reading: X



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