ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

HOPE FOR YOUTH: A WEB RESOURCE

BY

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family, who are the root of my hope. My husband, Eric, has been an amazing ongoing support since the onset of this program and through the numerous hours and months of the completion of this project. My children, Jacob and Paige, have also been patient while mommy completed her “work” and have served as the best possible inspiration. This is further dedicated to my parents, Jim and Yvonne, who have always believed that I could and would complete a Masters degree. Thanks for all of your ongoing support.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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ABSTRACT

The following document supports a final project entitled Hope for Youth: A Web Resource. Adolescents have been targeted and a hope-focussed website has been chosen as a method which can enable youth to learn about hope and experience hope in their lives. An extensive literature search and literature review on adolescence, adolescents and their use of the internet and hope theory supported the need for a hope-focussed website designed specifically for adolescents. Therefore the literature search and review and the steps taken to develop this website are described within the document. The website is one which is informative, rather than counselling based and can further be utilized by other professionals in their work with youth.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional period where one is journeying from childhood to adulthood. For youth, this can be a time filled with exciting choices and opportunities, during which adolescents are developing their identities and deciding on what kind of person they would like to become (O'Koon, 1997; Sartor & Youniss, 2002). For some, adolescence can also be a challenging time of navigating peer and family relationships, discovering independence, and thinking about what they would like from life in the future. Adolescence can also be a time during which teens may encounter feelings of hopelessness. These feelings arise from the many problems they face including, but not limited to, poverty (Bolland, 2003), exposure to violence (Hinton-Nelson, Roberts, & Snyder, 1996), and parental marital issues (East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006; VanderValk, deGoede, Spruijt, & Meeus, 2007). Such feelings of hopelessness have been linked to issues with low self-esteem (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003) and suicidal ideations and attempts (Page et al., 2006; Stewart et al., 2005). Hopeful thinking has seen much success in helping individuals achieve their goals, navigate difficult times in their lives, and find the answers they are searching for (Gilman, Dooley, & Florell, 2006; Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, & Rand, 2002; Wilson, Syme, Boyce, Battistich, & Selvin, 2005). Through this project, a hope-focussed website for adolescents was created where they can learn about hope and how to apply this to their lives, thereby potentially reducing feelings of hopelessness. For those adolescents who already have hope in their lives, it serves as a site where youth can learn more about hope, how it can manifest itself in their lives, and how they can enjoy the positive outcomes of

hopeful thinking. The website further serves as a reference and resource for professionals working with adolescents.

In order to understand how a hope-focussed website can assist adolescents with life in general, with achieving various goals, and with struggling with hopelessness and other concerns such as angst (VanderValk et al., 2007), concerns with self-discovery (East et al., 2006), and navigation of relationships with peers, family members, and adults (East et al.; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), it is important to have an understanding of hope theory. When individuals live and experience hope in their lives, they are better able to achieve goals, become more at peace with their life circumstances, and create significant positive changes in their lives (Gilman, et al., 2006; Snyder et al., 2002; Wilson, et al., 2005). Review of previous studies has shown that when health professionals guide individuals through the use of hope theory, and when these individuals put hope theory into practice in their own lives, it has assisted them physically, mentally and emotionally (Edey & Jevne, 2003; Stone, 1998). The use of hope-focussed counselling has proven beneficial when individuals are facing issues such as depression (Stone), HIV and AIDS (Wong-Wylie, 2003); suicide (Hanna & Green, 2004), relationship difficulties (Worthington, 2005), bereavement (Cutcliffe, 2006), addictions (Wilson et al., 2005), and difficulties with academics as students (Gilman et al.), among others. Studies have not only shown that the concept of hope finds success with adults, but also with adolescents (Snyder et al., 2003).

Further to the concept of hope theory, it is important to acknowledge the prominence and importance of technology in today's generation of youth. Adolescents are very technologically knowledgeable and aware (Guinee, Eagleton, & Hall, 2003). Teens are able to easily access information using the internet (Freedman, 2003) and often connect more with

peers on line than in person (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). For example, social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook are extremely popular with teens, and a place where youth network, connect and communicate with each other on a regular basis. Rather than look to adults or professionals for help in person, teens will seek out answers and assistance on the internet (Freedman). Although there are other health and wellness websites available to teens on the internet, a thorough internet search using various search engines reveals that there are currently no hope-focussed websites designed for adolescents available at this time.

Given the facts that adolescence is a time of transition that can bring about exciting opportunities, new challenges, and possibly feelings of hopelessness, that youth are inclined to search the internet for answers to their personal struggles before seeking advice from others in person, and that hope can play a valuable role throughout adolescence, it would stand to reason that a hope-focussed website with information, references and resources designed for adolescents may serve as a valuable tool. In an extensive search of the internet, there were no hope websites found that targeted adolescents in particular.

Project Structure

The purpose of this project was to create a hope-focussed website for adolescents where they can learn about hope and how it may play a role in their lives. Further to this, it will link youth to other hope-related references and counselling resources. The website can also be used by counsellors as an example of presenting hope theory to adolescents they may be working with. The website is not intended to be an internet-counselling site for teens, but rather a reference point for bringing hope into their lives, providing them with information about what hope is, how hope can play a role in their lives, some of the positive outcomes that hope can bring, and connect them to other hope-related resources.

A review of the literature on hope theory and adolescents from various on-line databases and the library at The Hope Foundation of Alberta was completed. The review focussed on the use of hope theory in studies prior to this project, as well as use of the internet for specific websites targeted at enhancing the well-being of adolescents. A thorough search of the internet for hope resources and information for youth was also conducted.

The website is presented within this paper, including details of its creation and steps for completion. The conclusion of the project will include a synthesis of the project and implications for professional practice and for further studies.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Foundations

The Adolescent Years

Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood. It is a time during which youth are learning about the person they are and deciding about the person they would like to become. This is a key time for identity development (O'Koon, 1997; Sartor & Youniss, 2002) where factors such as parental involvement (Sartor & Youniss) and peer attachments (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola, 1996; O'Koon) are a major influence. It is a time when adolescents may find themselves beginning to separate somewhat from their parents as they develop into unique individuals, less dependent on their parents for positive emotional adjustment (Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, & Engels, 2005). Some describe adolescence as a crisis in social adjustment, as many of life's major demands are placed upon teenagers within a matter of a few years. For example, teens are faced with achieving self-direction and choosing a vocational path. This journey of self-discovery can be filled with excitement and opportunities for some, while others might encounter challenges and barriers.

Although adolescence can bring new insights, opportunities, and goals for some, many youth face challenging issues such as marital discord between their parents (VanderValk et al., 2007), changing family structures (East et al., 2006), the lure and easy accessibility of alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana (Wilson et al., 2005), exposure to violence between peers, adults, and within their communities (Hinton-Nelson et al., 1996), poverty and lack of opportunities (Bolland, 2003), and low self-esteem (Snyder et al., 2003) among others. Although it has been shown that youth can sustain a sense of hope through difficult

times (Herth, 1998), many times the challenges youth face lead them to feelings of hopelessness (Bolland; Page et al., 2006; Stewart et al., 2005).

Feelings of hopelessness have been linked to various behaviors in teens, including adolescents reacting to their uncertain futures by abandoning the idea of hope and engaging in high levels of risky behaviors such as violence, substance abuse, sexual acting out, and accidental injury (Bolland, 2003). Further to these self-damaging behaviors, hopelessness in teens has also been linked to suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts in adolescents (Page et al., 2006; Stewart et al., 2005). Although many other factors, such as loneliness, self-efficacy and cognitive variables remain as indicators of suicidal ideation, hopelessness appears to be the strongest link to suicidal behaviors across gender and race (Stewart et al.).

Whether adolescence presents itself as a positive time of self-discovery, one riddled with challenges and barriers, or a mixture of both, it is clear that adolescents have a great deal to cope with. Hope is a concept that can help adolescents navigate through both exciting and challenging times. Hopeful thinking may assist adolescents to continue on a positive journey of self-discovery and provide some refuge from the challenges and feelings of hopelessness that may develop.

Hope and Hope Theory

In order to understand how hope may be able to assist adolescents navigate their transitional years, it is important to have some knowledge about hope and hope theory. Hope and hope theory can be described and defined in many different ways. Hope is an abstract concept that is experienced and viewed differently by each individual. It is symbolized in unique ways depending on one's experiences and views of the world (The Hope Foundation of Alberta, 2008). Hope can exist as a relatively stable personality disposition (i.e., a trait) or

as a more temporary frame of mind (i.e., a state) (Snyder, et al., 2003). Hope can remain constant or even increase through the most difficult of times (Hinton-Nelson et al.,1996). Hope can flow from one person's life to another's, thereby influencing how the latter person sees the world and pursues goals (Snyder, et.al.). Hope can be multifaceted, continually changing and evolving and can involve the process of creating and recreating hope in the midst of constant life changes (Herth, 1998).

Hopefulness can be seen as a human characteristic that allows individuals to transcend disappointments, pursue goals, and have a positive view of the future, rather than one that is seen as futile or unbearable (Hinds et al., 1987 as cited in Herth, 1998). Some believe that the development of hope or hopelessness begins in early childhood (Herth). For example, according to some, if a child's emotional needs are met, hope and affective states of goodness naturally emerge (Erickson, 1982 as cited in Herth; Schmale, 1964). On the other hand, if these emotional needs are not met, then a feeling of hopelessness occurs instead. Further to this, Pentecost and McNab (2007) believe that children need to feel as if their voices are heard and that they are noticed in order to develop feelings of hope rather than hopelessness. Wong and Heriot (2008) found that parents' expectations that desirable things will occur in their child's future can influence their children's level of hope and future outcomes. Others believe that both hope and hopelessness can be learned (Herth; Stotland, 1969 as cited in Herth). Smith (1983) reasoned that adolescents learn to be hopeful, as this is a prerequisite for achieving satisfaction in adulthood and is essential for resolving serious threats. Hendricks-Ferguson (2006) found that older adolescents in her study were often more spiritual and hopeful than younger adolescents, and that adolescents can better learn to

become more hopeful at later developmental stages. Therefore, hopeful thinking can be learned out of necessity in adolescence, even if it had not been cultivated in early childhood.

Hope has also been seen as being associated with empowerment (Pentecost & McNab, 2007). Some view hope as the expectation that desirable things will occur in the future (Wong & Heriot, 2008). Hope appears to be fairly consistent across race (Chang & Banks, 2007), age, and gender (Hedricks-Ferguson, 2006), with minimal fluctuations from person to person.

In a study by Herth (1998), one 11 year old subject described hope in a way that seems to encapsulate much of the research on hope:

> Hope is essential! If you don't have hope for the future, you'll be kind of dead. Your mom and sisters and brothers have to see hope in you for them to catch it. Hope sort of comes from way down deep inside yourself: sometimes it takes someone who cares about you to help you believe in hope. You have to sometimes dig deep but it's there. You must share that hope with others if it is to grow stronger and be a light for others' hope. (p.1066)

Hope, therefore, is a concept that has been defined in many different ways by various researchers and professionals. Given the variety of definitions and conceptions of hope, it is clear that hope is a concept that is personal and carries different meanings for different individuals. What remains consistent is how hope has helped individuals make changes in their lives and persevere through challenging and exciting times. Counsellors have found success employing the concepts of hope theory in their work with various individuals and situations (Edey & Jevne, 2003; Stone, 1998). Hope often plays a subordinate role to the discussion of the problem between the counsellor and client and acts as a silent factor in

counselling. However, Edey and Jevne believe that by using hope-focussed questions and language that conveys hope, counsellors can facilitate making hope more visible to themselves and their clients. Language such as "yet" and "when" can be infused within the conversation to keep hopeful thinking alive. For example, a counsellor might say "How will things be different *when* you have overcome your addiction?" or "You have not found an important adult role model in your life *yet*." Other examples of hope-focussed language are questions such as "What gives you hope in your life?" or "On a scale of 1 to 10, where does your hope lie right now and why?"

In addition to using hope-focussed language or hopeful conversations, a counsellor might also use hope-focussed activities. A hopeful counsellor might encourage a client to complete various hopeful activities between sessions, such as recording funny moments that arise, volunteering or performing a random act of kindness, taking pictures that represent hope, growing and nurturing something such as a plant, smiling at strangers, or creating a hope kit, that is a small box filled with hopeful items or items that are reminders about what makes life worth living (Jevne, 2000). These are just some ways that counsellors can infuse hope into their work with individuals. When adolescents engage in such hope-focussed activities, this allows them to continue to keep thinking about hope and searching for hope even after they leave the counselling session.

The application of hope theory has assisted individuals with many types of challenges including, but not limited to depression (Stone, 1998), HIV and AIDS (Wong-Wylie, 2003); suicide (Hanna & Green, 2004), relationship difficulties (Worthington, 2005), bereavement (Cutcliffe, 2006), addictions (Wilson et al., 2005), and students having difficulties with academics (Gilman et al., 2006). Many of the issues cited above are those that adolescents

may encounter, and studies have shown that the use of hope theory has been successful not only with adults, but with adolescents as well (Herth, 1998; Snyder et al., 2002).

As hope theory has been so successful in assisting individuals with their various life journeys, it would stand to reason that it is a concept that could greatly assist youth in this transitional period of life. Further examination of the research on hope and adolescence reveals its importance in more depth.

Adolescents and Hope

Hope can manifest itself in many different ways in children and youth. Herth (1998) examined hopefulness as seen through the eyes of homeless children. She found that five themes representing hope emerged from the data: connectedness, internal resources, cognitive strategies, energy, and hope objects.

Connectedness

In terms of connectedness, Herth (1998) found that the youth in her study felt they were more hopeful with the presence of a significant other, which might mean a parent, a teacher, a friend, or a role model. The adolescents identified that if another person had hope for them, it also provided affirmation of their worth (Herth). The importance of connectedness to another person has been found to be true in other studies of hope for adults and adolescents (Owen, 1989). For example, Owen found that, for both adults and adolescents, the need for connectedness to at least one other person was absolutely necessary in order to sustain and nurture hopeful feelings and hopeful thinking.

Internal Resources

Internal resources were another common theme emerging from the study conducted by Herth (1998). Adolescents placed importance on personal competence as a factor in

nurturing their hope (Herth). Small successes and memories of when they were successful in the past are reflections of such personal competence. Since the adolescents often viewed hope in terms of having a goal and working towards that goal, the idea of personal competence is paramount in sustaining their level of hope. Further to this, many of the adolescents believed that finding a deep inner strength and confidence in oneself further increased their level of hope (Herth).

Cognitive Strategies

Herth (1998) found that using cognitive strategies that served to remove negative thoughts and foster hope during difficult times was important in keeping hope alive for the adolescents in her study. Some of the cognitive strategies the adolescents identified as being useful were talking to self, posting notes, and 'being tough' (Herth). Adolescents also cited music as being an important cognitive strategy that could also bring about a sense of hope and connectedness (Herth).

Energy

Herth (1998) believes that hope requires an investment of energy and also gives off energy. Herth found that psychosocial and physical energy was important to the adolescents in her study, as was the forced effort required to sustain hope. That is, the adolescents had to consciously remind themselves to remain hopeful. Most of the adolescents believed that, in order to kindle hope, a conscious effort was necessary, but that with each small glimpse of hope, a new energy emerged (Herth). Herth further found that the adolescents in her study focussed their energy on others, rather than just on themselves. There also appears to be a need to constantly manage negative outside factors and tend to one's inner sense of hope, in order for hopeful thinking to remain (Ersek, 1992 as cited in Herth).

Hope Objects

Hope objects in the study conducted by Herth (1998) were found to be inanimate objects that held some sort of special meaning. Hope objects have also been identified as being important for acute and chronically physically and mentally ill adults (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Miller, 1989; Raleigh, 1992) as well as with individuals in long-term care facilities (Herth, 1993, as cited in Herth). Herth postulates it may be that when possessions are limited in number, the few remaining objects take on significant meaning. Both homeless children and adults residing in care facilities would certainly have limited material possessions, leaving them to cherish what few items they do have.

Herth (1998) further found that laughter and humour helped to sustain hope in children and adolescents, as they perhaps act as buffers against stressful life circumstances. All the youth in the study were able to identify what they found to be hopeful in their lives and believed that it was essential to their well-being. Herth found that the children and youth identified hope as being two-dimensional, with an inner centre core of hope, and an outer ring of hope that was flexible and could be directed. The children saw the inner core as something deep inside them that remains despite the loss of specific hopes. The outer core could change or be reframed depending on their current life circumstances.

Specific to adolescents, Herth (1998) found that adolescents drew a great deal of hope from the idea of openness and possibility. Further to this, adolescents sought out hope in music lyrics. For these adolescents, hope often involved a particular goal and working towards it, highlighting for them the importance of personal ability and competence. Herth found that adolescents not only were able to have hope for themselves, but were also able to foster hope for others. These adolescents further found a need to feel a connection to at least

one other person and to find resources within themselves to engender hope during difficult times (Herth; Snyder et al., 2003). Engendering hopeful thinking leads to positive outcomes for adolescents.

The above research indicates how hope can manifest itself in adolescents' lives in various ways. Although some adolescents may already naturally have feelings of hope within them, and may be able to identify how hope is represented in their lives, these adolescents may wish to learn how to bring hope into their lives in different ways. Further to this, the studies referenced assume that all adolescents experience some form of hope in their lives, where other studies have shown that this may not be true (Bolland, 2003; Page et al., 2006; Stewart et al., 2005), and that in fact, many adolescents may experience hopelessness instead. For example, a study by Stewart et al. identified that many adolescents with depressive symptoms experience extreme hopelessness, leading to suicidal ideation. Page et al. noted that adolescents who attempted suicide experienced extreme loneliness and hopelessness. Further to this, Bolland found that many adolescents reacted to uncertain futures by abandoning hope and engaging in high levels of risky behaviors, such as violence, substance use, and sexual behavior. Adolescents who are experiencing feelings of hopelessness may not know where to turn to find hope and how to make hope a personal experience for them. A website offering ideas of how hope can manifest itself in an adolescent's life could assist youth in finding a starting point for including hope in their lives.

Outcomes of Hopeful Thinking

Snyder et al. (2003) are leading researchers in hope theory as it pertains to adolescents. According to Snyder et al's (2003) hope theory, "hope reflects individuals' perceptions regarding their capacities to (1) clearly conceptualize goals, (2) develop the

specific strategies to reach those goals, and (3) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies" (p. 122). The experience of hope can help predict psychological and physical well-being for adolescents (Snyder, et al., 2002) and can help determine athletic and academic success for youth. Hope is also preventative as it can deter problems such as drug and alcohol use, violence, and pregnancy from arising in adolescents' lives (Snyder et al., 2002, Wilson et al., 2005; Hinton-Nelson et al., 1996). Some reasons for this are that those adolescents with hopeful thinking are more optimistic and focus on success rather than failure (Snyder et al., 2002). Hopeful youth also have better problem-solving abilities (Snyder et. al., 2003). Therefore, when they encounter difficult choices, their hopeful thinking, optimism, and problem-solving skills deter them from pursuing risky behaviors such as drugs, alcohol, violence, and sexual activity.

Snyder et al. (2003) have found many positive outcomes for youth who possess significant hopeful thinking. Snyder et al. (2003) postulate that a youth's higher hopeful thinking is positively associated with perceived competence and self-esteem (Snyder, et al., 2003). Higher hope is related to greater scholastic and social competence as well as to increased creativity. There is also a positive correlation between greater problem solving abilities and actual academic achievements. It stands to reason then, that high-hope students have reported significantly greater academic satisfaction than their low-hope peers (Gilman et al., 2006; Snyder, et al., 2003).

Higher hope has also been related positively to superior athletic performances among student athletes and these high-hope students have reported being less likely to consider quitting their sports (Snyder, et al., 2003). An adolescent's hopeful thinking most often leads

to social competence, pleasure in getting to know others, enjoyment in frequent interpersonal interaction, and interest in the goal pursuits of others (Snyder, et al., 2003).

Hopeful children often draw upon their own memories of positive experiences to keep them resilient during challenging times in their lives (Snyder et al. 2003). Hinton-Nelson, et al. (1996) found that adolescents could remain very hopeful despite going though significant trauma such as witnessing violence. This finding shows that youths' hopeful thinking can remain constant or even increase through the most difficult of times. Hopeful thinking also leads to higher overall global life satisfaction (Gilman, et al., 2006).

The findings from the literature review demonstrate that hope and hopeful thinking can lead to positive outcomes for youth. Clearly, outcomes for youth who are most hopeful appear to be most positive. Youth would benefit from any resources that could encourage hopeful thinking. For youth who are already hopeful thinkers, a website providing further resources about hope and hopeful thinking will allow them to continue to reap the benefits of their already hopeful thinking. For those youth who are struggling with having or keeping hope a part of their lives, such a website may serve to assist them in seeing the positive outcomes that hopeful thinking could bring.

Fostering Hope in Youth

Given the above mentioned positive outcomes that hopeful thinking imparts to adolescents, how then can youth bring hope and hopeful thinking into their lives? Helping students set measurable goals that are achievable and important to them can help impart hope in their lives (Herth, 1998; Snyder et al., 2003). Further to this, engaging youth in exciting activities that involve teamwork has been found to be effective in raising their levels of hope (Snyder et al., 2003). Surrounding youth with dependable and encouraging networks can

further bolster their levels of hope (Pentecost et al., 2007), as can ensuring there is a significant other present in their lives (Herth). Adolescents can build hope in their lives by developing hopeful resources and cognitive strategies that can strengthen their internal hopeful core (Herth). Youth can be encouraged to identify and cherish hopeful objects in their lives (Herth; Raleigh, 1992). Adolescents can be encouraged to use humour and laughter in their everyday activities (Herth). Further to this, music and lyrics to music can be a useful tool in developing and strengthening hope within adolescents (Herth; Peden, 1993).

There has been a great deal of research that has shown positive outcomes in fostering hope in youth through support groups (Barnum, Snyder, Rapoff, Mani, & Thompson, 1998), individual and group psychotherapy (Child Welfare, 1998), school groups (Zettergren, 2003), and prevention and intervention programs (Bolland, 2003). With adolescents' easy access to the internet and their growing use of such a tool (Freedman, 2003; Valkenburg et al., 2007), it would stand to reason that fostering hope in youth through a hope-related website could prove to be highly beneficial for adolescents.

Adolescents and the Internet

The current generation of youth have been born into an age where technology reigns. The youth of today tend to look to their peers or technology, such as the internet, to find the answers they are looking for on a variety of topics (Freedman, 2003; Valkenburg et al., 2007). Valkenburg et al. reported that teens felt closer to their friends if they connected with them on-line. Further to this, adolescents were more likely to self-disclose to professionals and peers if they had found relatable information on the internet that demonstrated that others had feelings and concerns similar to theirs.

There have been several studies dedicated to examining adolescents' abilities to search the internet, how they go about this, and the accuracy of the information they find (Freedman, 2003; Guinee et al., 2003). For example, Guinee et al. wanted to examine the search strategies of adolescents. The researchers followed 161 junior and senior high school students. The data collected included students' descriptions of the search process, observations of student searching behaviours, and audit trail lists of search strings used by students. The researchers found that when conducting research on the internet, adolescents tend to resort to familiar cognitive strategies: starting with what they know, maintaining paradigms from the physical world, and adhering to time-tested practices.

In another example, Freedman (2003) explored how adolescents searched the internet for accurate health related information, and whether they were able to retain this information after a week. The author had sixty nine junior high school students search the internet for information regarding cancer prevention. Their search results and methods of searching were analyzed, and subjects were further evaluated by the number and quality of web sites they visited in 30 minutes. Based on the results, the researcher was able to conclude that students who are more sceptical of the information that is available on the internet will gather more accurate information, regardless of gender, aptitude, previous media use or quality of web site visited. All students were able to search and find cancer prevention information, though the accuracy and number of sites found differed among students. Younger students tended to visit more websites than their older counterparts, while the older students seemed better able to focus their searching, and were therefore able to identify more websites that provided factual information about cancer. Older students were also better able to notice whether they visited sites ending in .gov or .org (generally regarded as sites that are deemed to be reliable.)

As demonstrated in the above research, adolescents have the necessary skills to navigate the web and are generally able to discern accurate information from that which is less accurate. A hope-focussed website for youth easily located through search engines, would be searchable and easy to navigate. Adolescents could locate the website when they are searching for topics such as hope or hopelessness, and hopefully find the information that they are looking for with regards to these issues.

Adolescents and Health-Related Websites

There have been numerous studies dedicated to examining the use and effectiveness of health and well-being websites targeted at adolescents (Santor et al., 2007; Valatais & Sword, 2005; Williamson et al., 2005). Such websites saw adolescents return to the site in search of further information and access to resources (Santor et al.). Researchers also noticed an increase in self-referrals to health professionals, health centers, and counsellors after adolescents had visited a health or wellness related website (Santor et al.). Further to this, the creators of these websites were able to determine that adolescents preferred to consult the internet for answers first before consulting other professionals (Santor et al.; Valatais et al.). As noted previously, research has also shown that adolescents have appropriate skills to search the internet, gather, evaluate, and retain accurate health-related information (Freedman, 2003), demonstrating the educational potential of health and wellness websites for adolescents.

Santor et.al (2007) created a dedicated health information website for adolescents. The researchers found that visits to the website were positively associated with visits to school health centers and guidance counsellors and referrals to health professionals. They

concluded that a school-based health information website holds significant promise for health promotion and early self-identification for emotional problems.

Valatais and Sword (2005) dedicated a website to parenting and pregnant teens. The authors found that, although there was somewhat of a lack of participation on the website, the teens were able to find information and support for the struggles that they were going through. The researchers further believe that with careful planning and with an appropriate design, online resources for youth can be mutually beneficial for both youth and service providers.

Williamson et al. (2005) created an internet-based behavioral weight loss program for overweight African-American girls. Participants were assigned to a behavioral program on-line or a weight loss information program on-line. Both groups experienced weight loss and reported positive outcomes, though the behavioral program saw more success in terms of weight loss. The researchers found that the program further extended to the participants' parents, as the parents changed their eating habits and experienced weight loss as well.

Webb, Burns, and Collin (2008) believe in the potential of the Internet to build a trusted community that could reduce stigma, facilitate help-seeking and aid in the prevention or management of mental health issues for youth. As such, the researchers created a supervised forum for youth to express their concerns and learn more about mental health issues. Feedback from youth suggested that this was positive and helpful, though the researchers were unable to decipher for certain whether in fact mental health stigma had been reduced in the world offline.

Research about online health and wellness websites for youth is a new and emerging area. Most of the data suggest that such websites have proven useful and beneficial for teens.

Not only have adolescents accessed such online resources and utilized the programs, but teens have sought answers and assistance from professionals in person after garnering initial information from the internet. No research was found with regards to hope websites for teens. In examining the research so far, it is evident that regardless of whether youth are hopeful or hopeless, they are searching for answers in their lives. The experience of hope can assist them in finding the answers they seek or the strength to continue through their transitional journey. Adolescents are skilled enough to search the internet and have found success in utilizing other health and wellness websites, not directly affiliated with hope. It would stand to reason, then, that a hope-focussed website for teens could prove to be accessible, utilizable, and valuable.

Hope-Related Websites for Youth

An extensive website search revealed a lack of hope-focussed resources available to youth on the internet. Although some websites pertaining to hope and youth were located, these websites, namely (www.hopeforyouth.com, www.livinghopeyouth.ca; www.hopeyouthcorps.com; www.powerofyouth.com; www.hopehelps.com) were invitations for programs that youth could attend in various locations. Although there are some websites that connect youth to hope programs, there does not appear to be a website specifically designed for teens that focuses on the concept of hope and the role it can play in their lives.

The lack of a hope-focussed website for teens demonstrates a gap in available positive online resources for youth. It has been shown through the research that hope and hopeful thinking leads to positive outcomes for adolescents, and that adolescents are most inclined to first seek help online before turning to others. As no hope-focussed website for teens is currently available, adolescents are unable to access an online resource to find

answers and information about hope. A hope-focussed website designed for teens where they can find suggestions about how to bring hope into their lives, some of the benefits of hopeful thinking, and resources where they can be connected to learn more about hope is a logical answer to their search.

Project Utility

It is clear from the literature review that adolescence is a transitional time in life during which adolescents might feel excited and hopeful, broken and hopeless or anywhere in between. It is a time where they are journeying from childhood to adulthood and are faced with many issues along the way, some of which are exciting opportunities and others of which are challenges that may seem insurmountable.

The research also points to the fact that hope has helped many individuals through both positive and challenging times. Hope has been useful for both adults and adolescents in overcoming various life obstacles. It has further been demonstrated that hope is very personal and can manifest itself in various ways. Adolescents may experience various degrees of hope or hopelessness. Hope can manifest itself in different ways in adolescents' lives.

It is clear that today's adolescents have grown up with the internet and are adept at utilizing such a tool. The overwhelming popularity of social networking websites such as MySpace and Facebook among adolescents, serves as an excellent example of how the internet has become a place for teens to socialize and spend their leisure time. The review of the research that was completed shows how youth are easily able to search and navigate the internet to select accurate information with regards to questions that they are seeking answers for (Freedman, 2003; Guinee et al., 2003). Although research on the utility and efficacy of health-related websites for youth is a new and emerging area, it appears as though such

websites have found success with youth in allowing them to anonymously seek out information and answers, and to feel comfortable in doing so. Further to this, adolescents often seek out other resources and professional help after having utilized such websites.

Given the above information, it would appear that an opportunity exists for creating new hope resources for teens. If adolescents are more inclined to seek out information on the internet, and if they are likely to experience positive outcomes from having hope play a role in their lives, then a hope-focussed website for teens is a logical answer to fill this gap.

A hope-focussed website for adolescents can also provide a resource for other professionals working with teens. Professionals can take ideas presented to adolescents in the website and implement them in their own work with teens in several ways. Professionals will be able to draw from the hope activities presented on the website and use them in their direct work with youth. For example, a counsellor might suggest building a hope box and assist his/her client in creating this. A counsellor might also help an adolescent find books, movies and songs that represent hope for that particular youth. Further to this, a counsellor can share the hope stories found on the website with youth as a means of inspiration and encouragement to seek out additional hope stories. Finally, a counsellor might also simply refer the adolescent to the website as a resource, and as a way of starting a conversation about hope with the adolescent. Teachers could also use this website, again drawing from the suggested activities, and present these to their class as a whole or to individual students as they see fit. The hope stories on the website would also be appropriate to share in a classroom setting and a great way to start a discussion about hope amongst classmates.

CHAPTER III

Procedures

The intention of this project was to create a hope-focussed website where adolescents could learn about hope, how it could manifest itself in their lives, and be connected to other hope-related resources. As a result, the project procedures consisted of three distinct steps: a) a literature review of hope theory, adolescence, and online health and wellness websites for teens, b) an internet search for hope-related websites for youth, and c) the construction of a hope-focussed website for youth. The details of these steps are outlined below.

Literature Search

This project involved a literature search in various areas. First, it involved learning about adolescent life and some of the opportunities and challenges it presents. A second literature search focussed on learning more about hope theory. A further search was conducted to determine adolescents' connection to the internet and ability to utilize the internet. The final literature search included searching for health and wellness websites for adolescents that had already been attempted and evaluated in previous studies. Various databases from the University of Calgary and Athabasca University libraries were consulted including PsychINFO, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, and Academic Search Premier. Keywords used to search for information included adolescence, adolescents, youth, development, challenges, hope, hope theory, hopelessness, internet, health, wellness, websites and various combinations of such keywords. Materials from The Hope Foundation of Alberta were also consulted, as well as materials and ideas obtained from seminars presented by The Hope Foundation of Alberta. The Hope Foundation of Alberta, a research centre affiliated with the University of Alberta, is a registered non-profit organization dedicated to understanding and enhancing hope in individuals, families, and institutions. The Hope

Foundation of Alberta's mission is "to increase the understanding of the role of hope in human life, so that people can be intentional in using hope to enhance quality of life, particularly in relation to health, learning and community" (The Hope Foundation of Alberta, 2008). The foundation offers research opportunities, specialized counselling services, speakers, workshops, and programs for children and youth.

Literature Review

The materials from the literature search were then reviewed and relevant articles were selected as supporting evidence for this project. Such articles focussed on hope theory, its utility, strengths, and challenges, adolescents and hope theory, adolescents and their ability to navigate the internet, and adolescents and their use of health and wellness websites. The materials found supported the utility of this project and are referenced as supporting materials within the project.

Internet Search

After the completion of the literature review, where it was determined that a hope-focussed website for adolescents would prove to be a beneficial venture, the next step for this project was to complete a thorough internet search to determine whether a hope-focussed website for teens already existed in some form or other. The search engines Google and Yahoo! were used to determine this. Keywords including adolescents, youth, and hope were applied to the search engines. The list of matches were reviewed one by one in the order they were presented within the search engine, that is, by what was determined to be the best match, to the least well-matched. Each website was examined to determine whether it was in any way similar to the hope-focussed website that was proposed for this project.

Website Construction

The final part of this project was the construction of the hope-focussed website for adolescents itself. Several websites offer templates for website completion. After review of these websites, www.freewebs.com was chosen as the website to assist in the completion of the hope-focussed website as it offered the most template options, the ability to work on the website and have it available for viewing while it was being constructed, and the ability to purchase the domain name for the website at any time during the construction of the website.

A template with a flowering orchid at the top of the page was chosen as this flowering orchid seemed to represent the idea of hope. A neutral beige background was selected so that the text and ideas could be in various bold colors and stand out to the reader. The menu bar on the right side of the page is in red, with the menu selections in white in order to contrast the beige background and content.

Originally, the domain name selected was www.hopeforyouth.com; however, this site already was in existence. This particular website is not a site where adolescents can access information about hope, but rather a site promoting a program that youth can register to attend. As a result, the domain name was changed to www.hopefulyouth.net and this domain name was purchased to display the site. The name is searchable in various search engines, including the most popular engines, such a Google and Yahoo! by using search parameters such as youth, hope, hopeful, and adolescents.

Website Content

The content for the website was chosen based on the information obtained from the literature review and feedback from staff members at The Hope Foundation of Alberta, namely the Director of Educational Services and Director of Counselling. The menu bar on

the right of the webpage clearly delineates the pages available for viewing: Home, What is hope, anyways?, Bring hope to your life, Hope stories, Movies and Books, Resources, and References. The specific content of each section will be further described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Specific Product: Web Resource

The product that was developed for this project is a hope-focussed website for adolescents. The website is entitled Hope for Youth and can be found at www.hopefulyouth.net. The site is geared towards adolescents in general, no matter what their level of hope or knowledge of hope. The site is designed for adolescents regardless of their experiences as youth, either positive or negative. The site can further be used by professionals as a reference for integrating hope theory into their work with adolescents. The product is intended to inform adolescents about hope and how it might play a valuable role in their lives, as well as to connect them to other resources where they might learn more about hope. The website uses language that adolescents can relate to and vibrant colors throughout to capture the website viewers' attention.

Organizational Structure of the Website

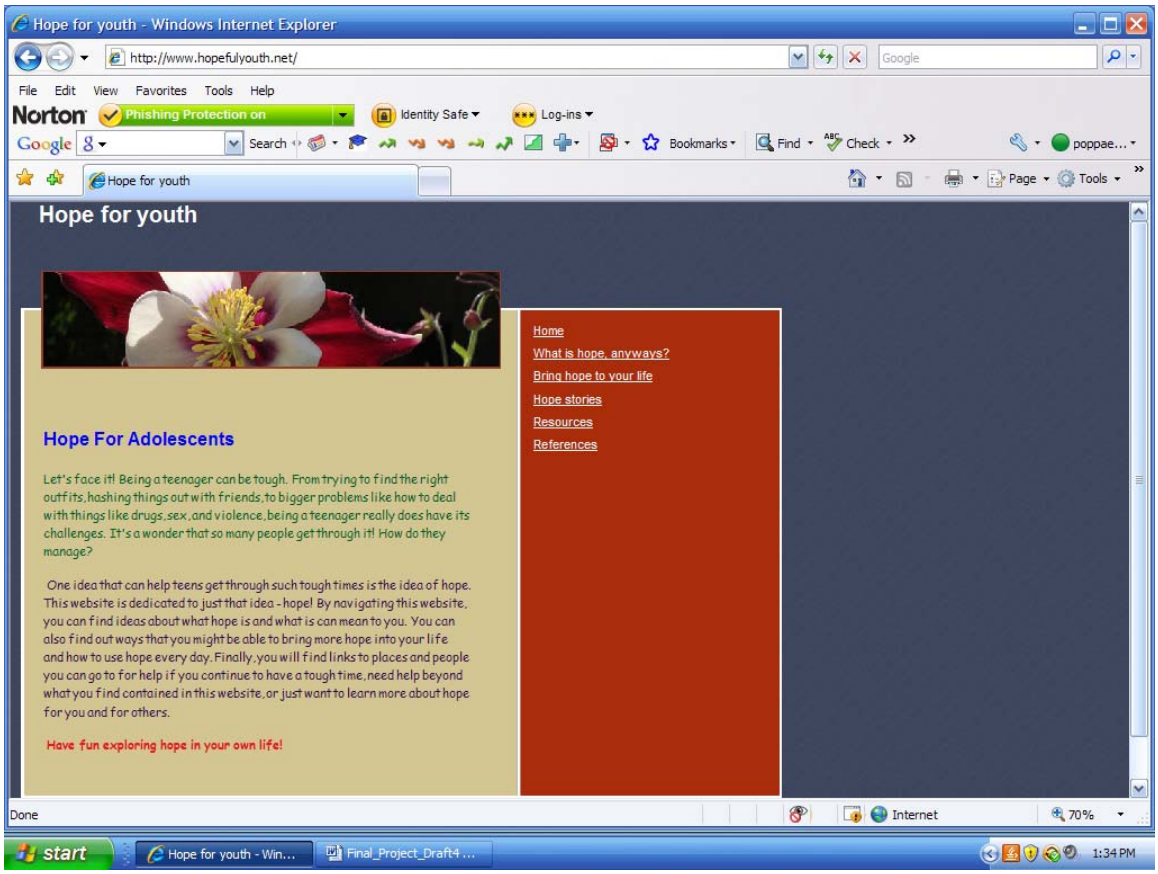
The organizational structure of the website is outlined in the site's menu bar which is located on the right side of the webpage. The menu bar appears on the right of each page, making it easy to move back and forth between the different pages located within the site. The website is organized into seven different pages: a) Home, b) What is hope, anyways?, c) Bring hope to your life, d) Hope stories, e) Movies and Books, f)Resources, and g) References. Each page can be accessed simply by clicking on the title of each page shown within the menu bar.

Home Page

The website home page serves as an introductory page that outlines for the viewer what the website is about and gives the viewer an idea of what one can expect from the

website pages that follow. The first paragraph on the page attempts to grab and keep adolescents attentions by discussing some common issues that they may regularly face.

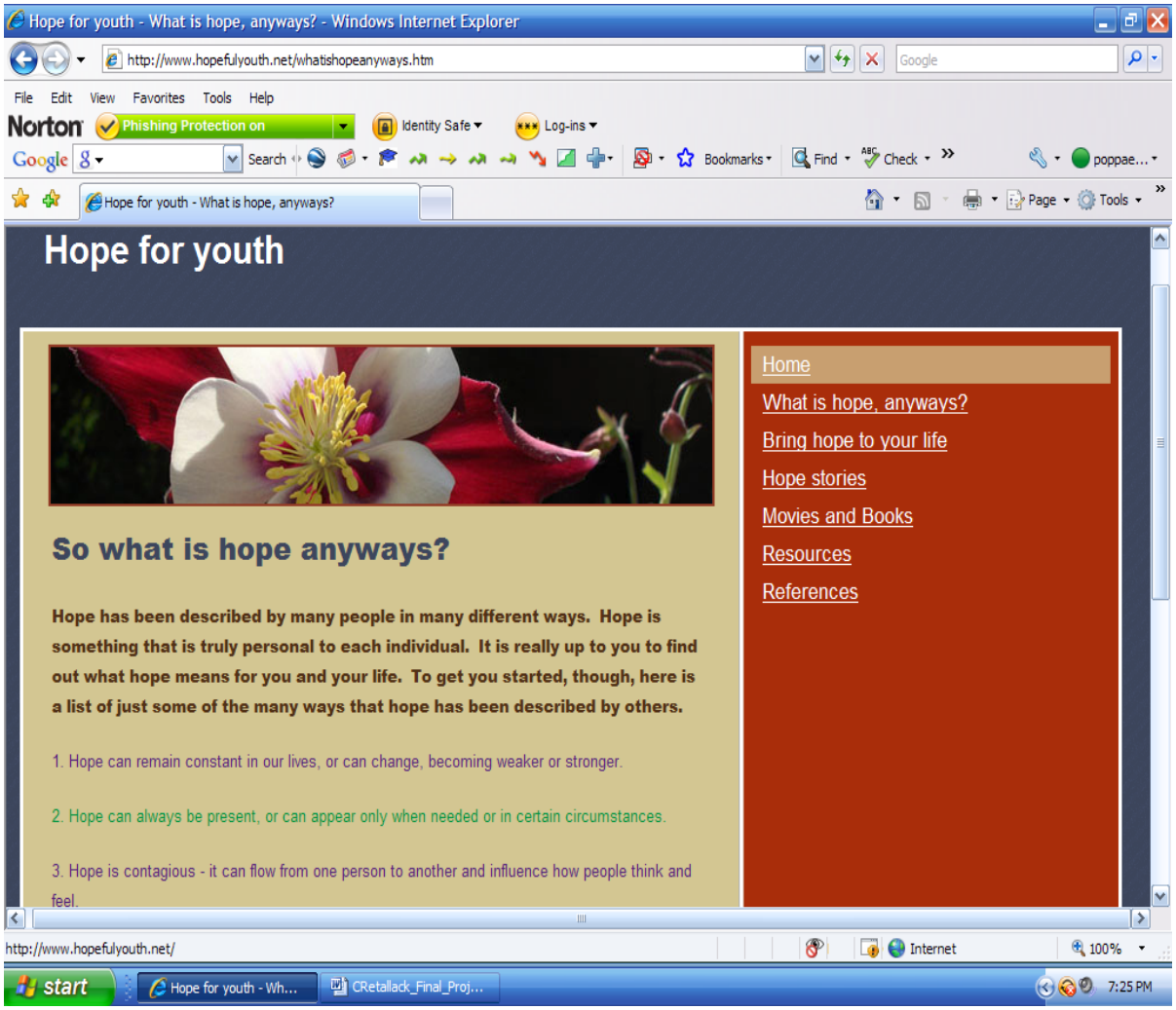
The page's top banner shows an orchid which is representative of hope (ie: the growth of a flower/new life) at the top of the page. This banner can be seen on this and all following pages of the website for the sake of consistency. The menu bar, displaying the Home page link and links to the rest of the pages on the site can be seen and accessed on the right hand side of the webpage. The site can be viewed at www.hopefulyouth.net. A snapshot of the home page can be seen here.

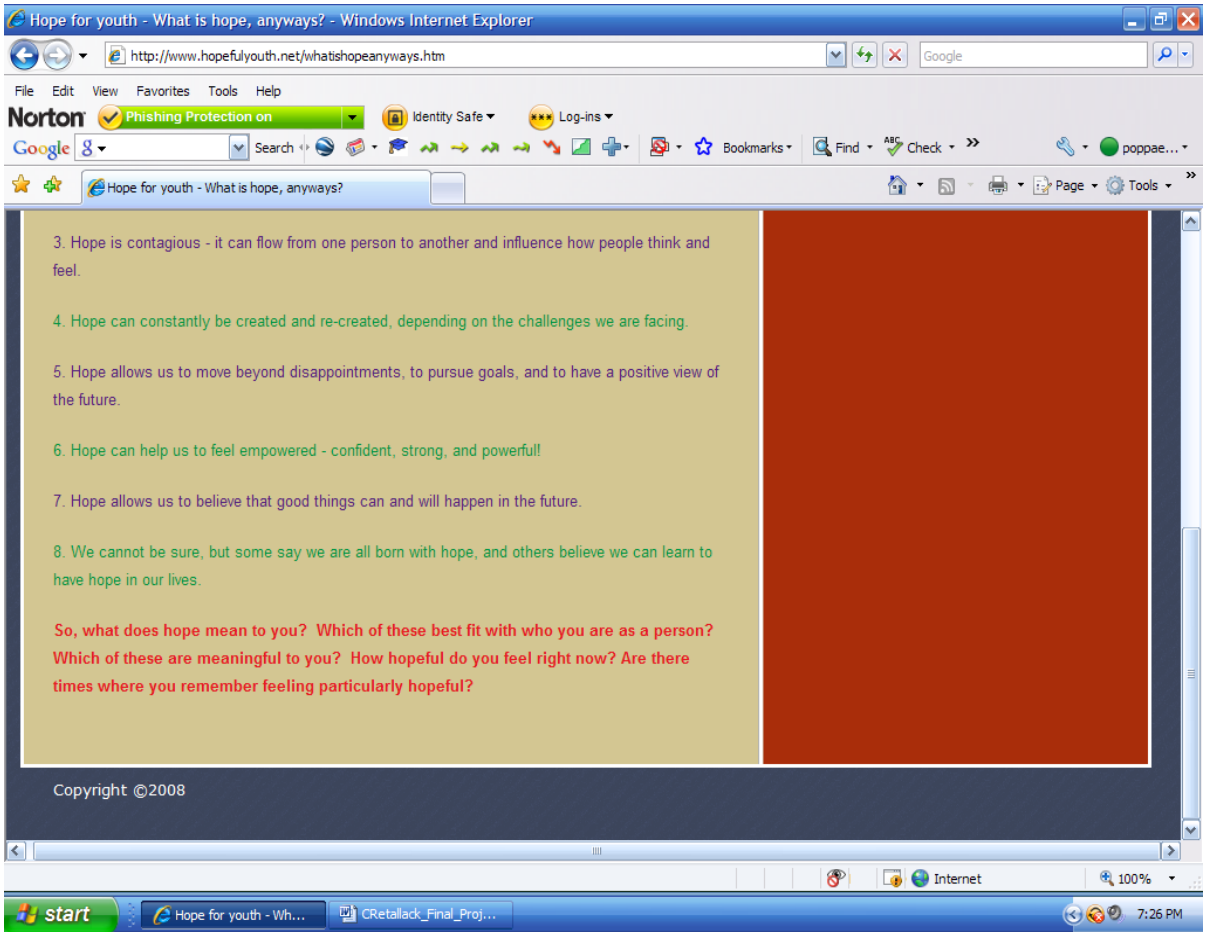


What is Hope, Anyways?

The page following the home page is entitled "What is hope, anyways?" For consistency, the orchid is displayed at the top of the page, and the menu bar remains on the

right side of the page. The content for this page was derived from the literature review completed for this project. The page describes hope and what hope can mean or represent. It provides a specific list of various ideas and concepts about hope, and then encourages the viewer to consider whether they identify with any of the presented hope concepts and to think about what hope might mean for them personally. The pages can be viewed here.

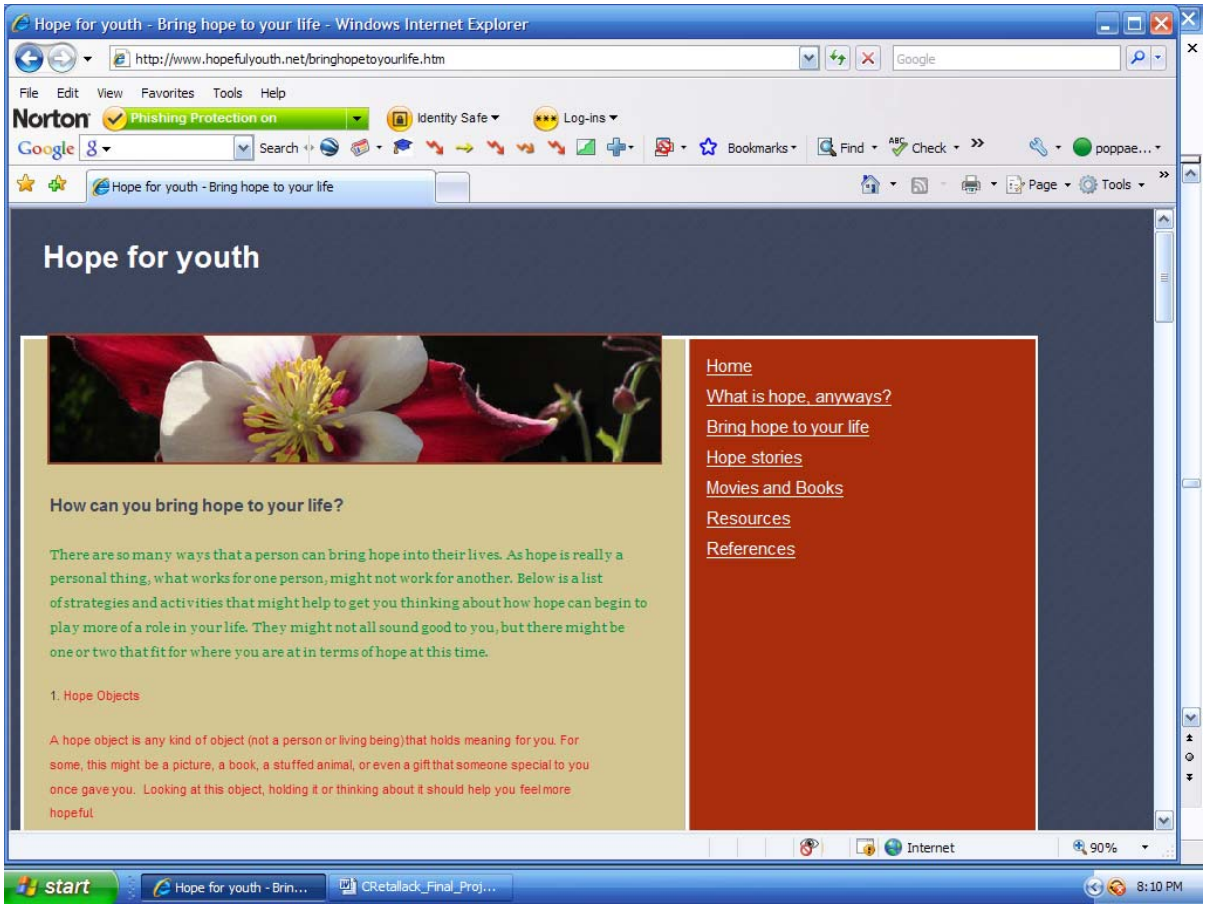


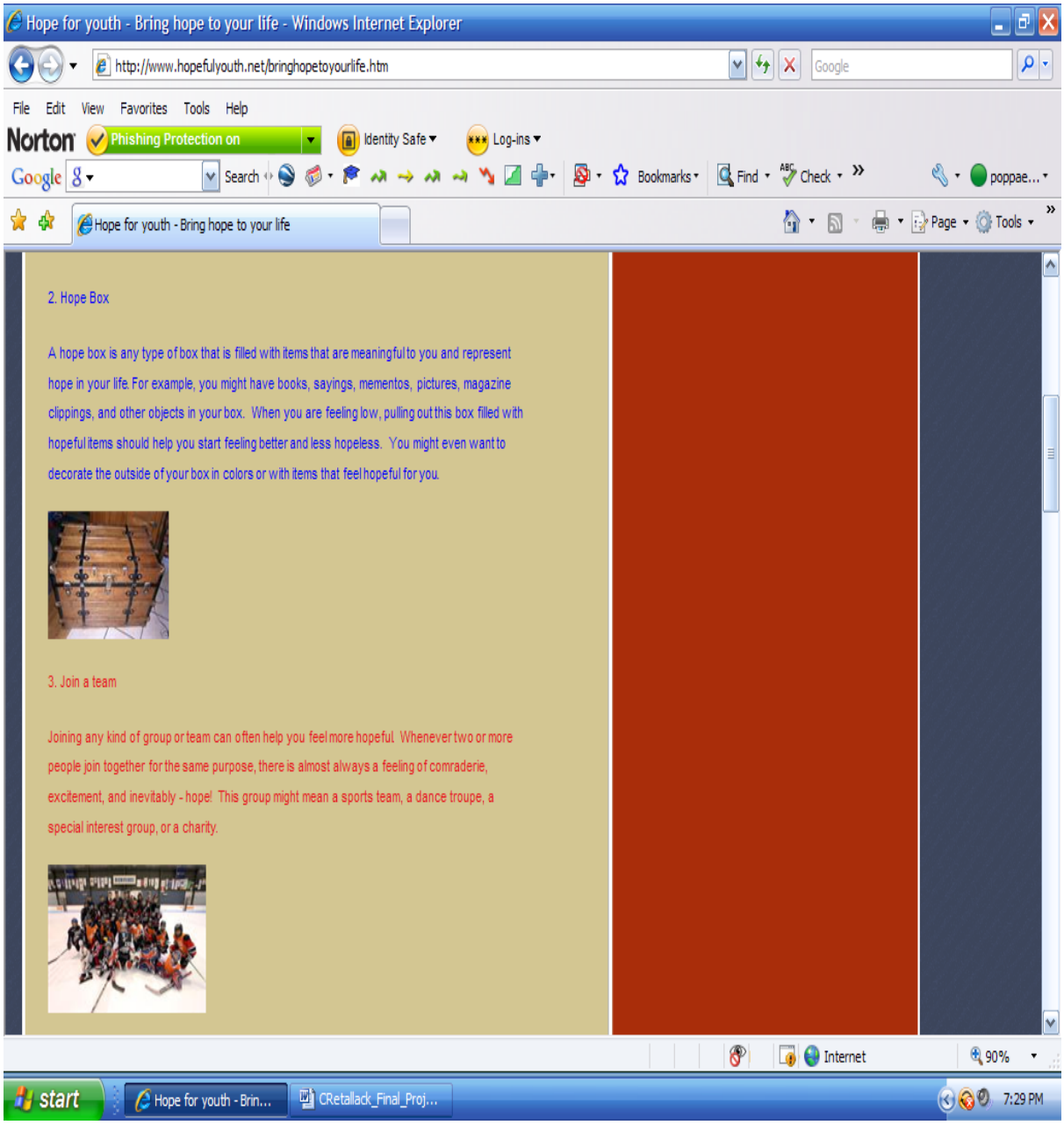


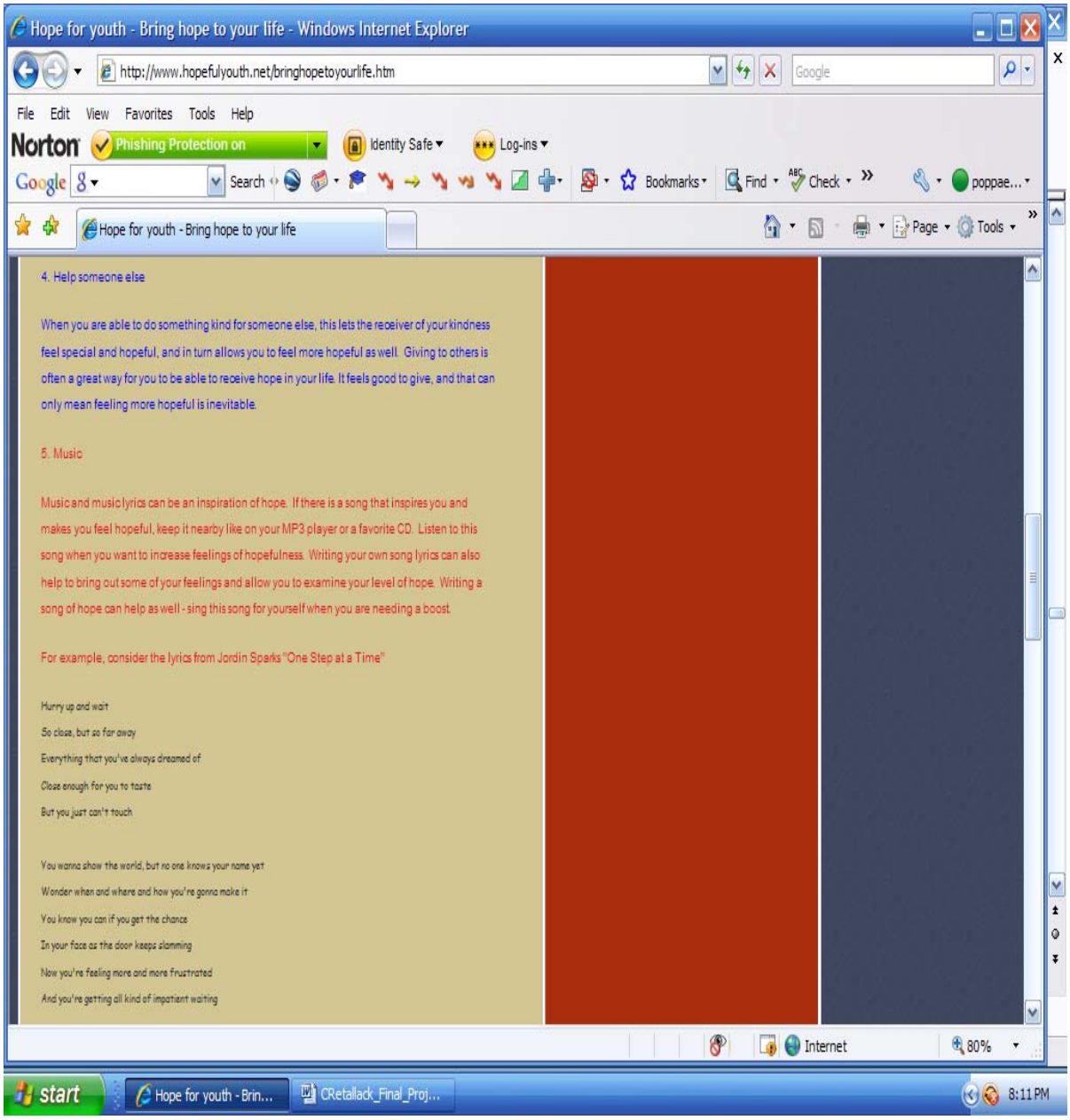
Bring Hope to Your Life

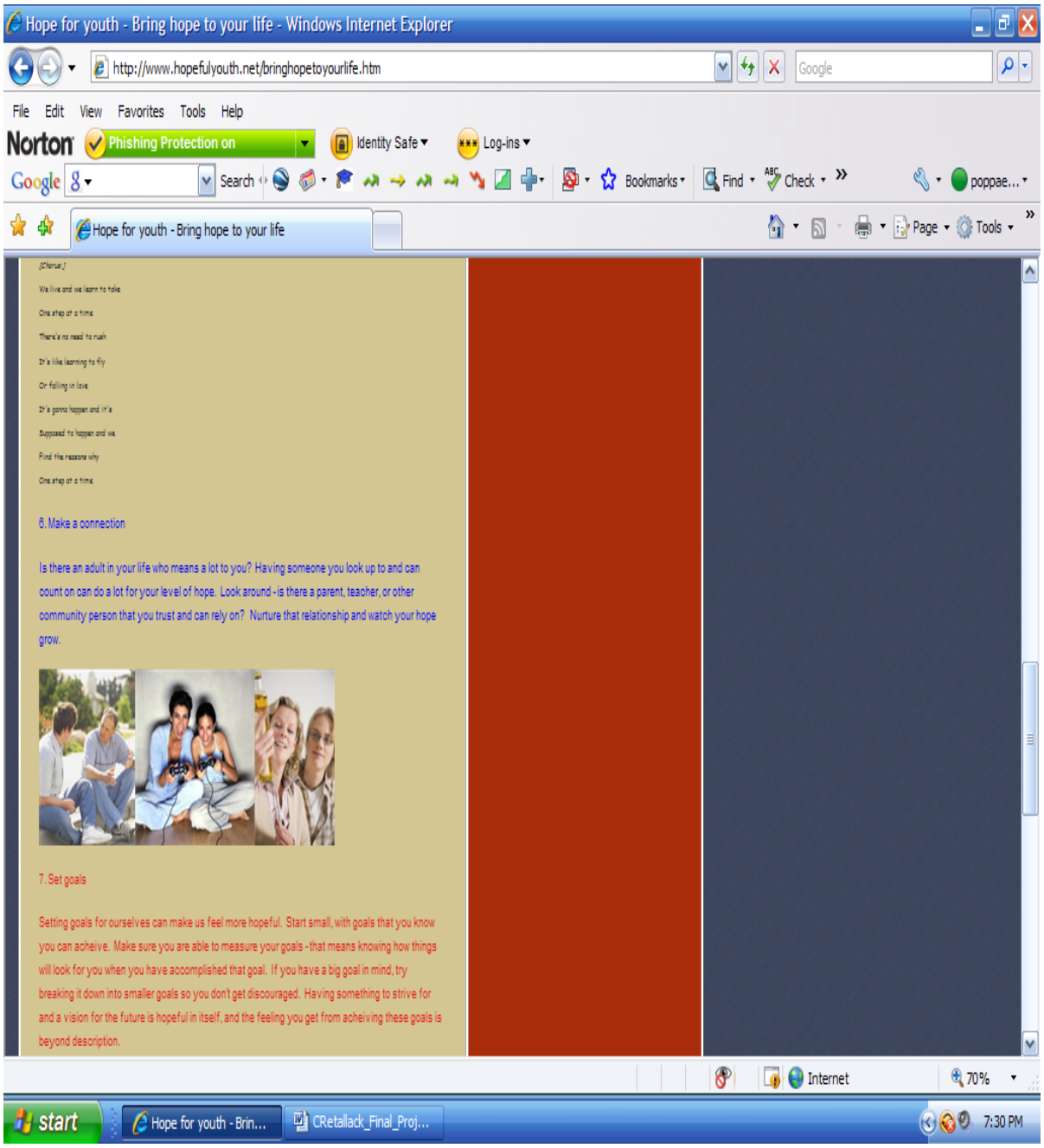
The next page, entitled "Bring hope to your life" presents several ideas for making hope a part of life. These ideas were derived from the literature review and from seminars attended at The Hope Foundation of Alberta. Many of the ideas are quite simple and easily achievable, while others might take more of a concerted effort from the viewer to achieve. For example, the reader might easily be able to identify song lyrics that they can start thinking about as hopeful, or their hope anthem, but creating a Hope Box is a project that might take a day or several weeks to create. This page contains graphics and images to help bring more interest and focus to the ideas. The purpose of this page is to generate many different ideas for bringing hope into the adolescent's life. This section of the website could

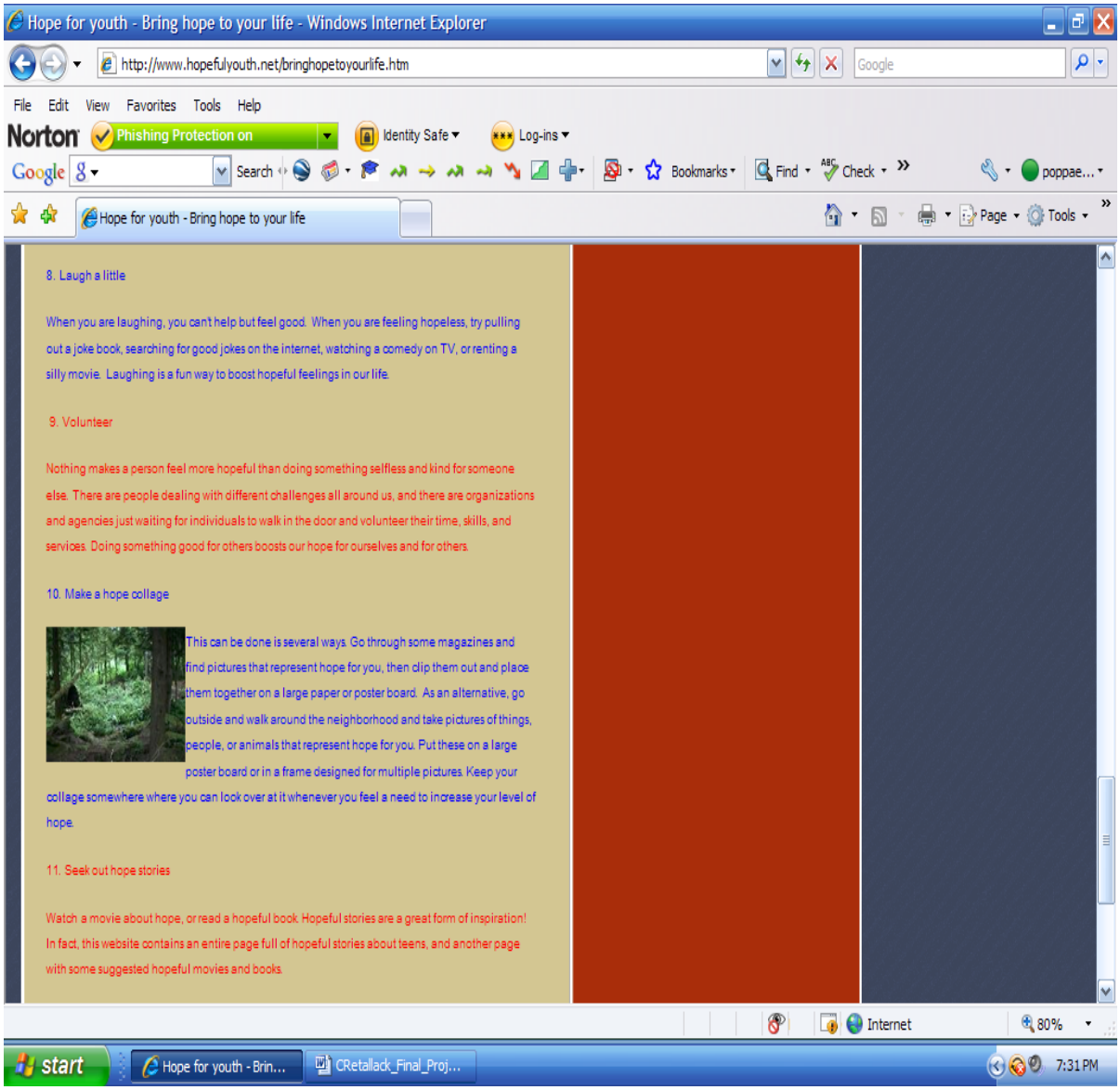
have been organized according to Herth's (1998) five themes: connectedness, internal resources, energy, hope objects, and cognitive strategies; however, the website was designed with the intent to keep the language familiar and relatable for adolescents. Language such as "cognitive strategies" and "internal resources" might seem too academic for teens, disrupting some of the website's intent. However, the activities listed do encompass each of Herth's five themes. The pages can be viewed here.

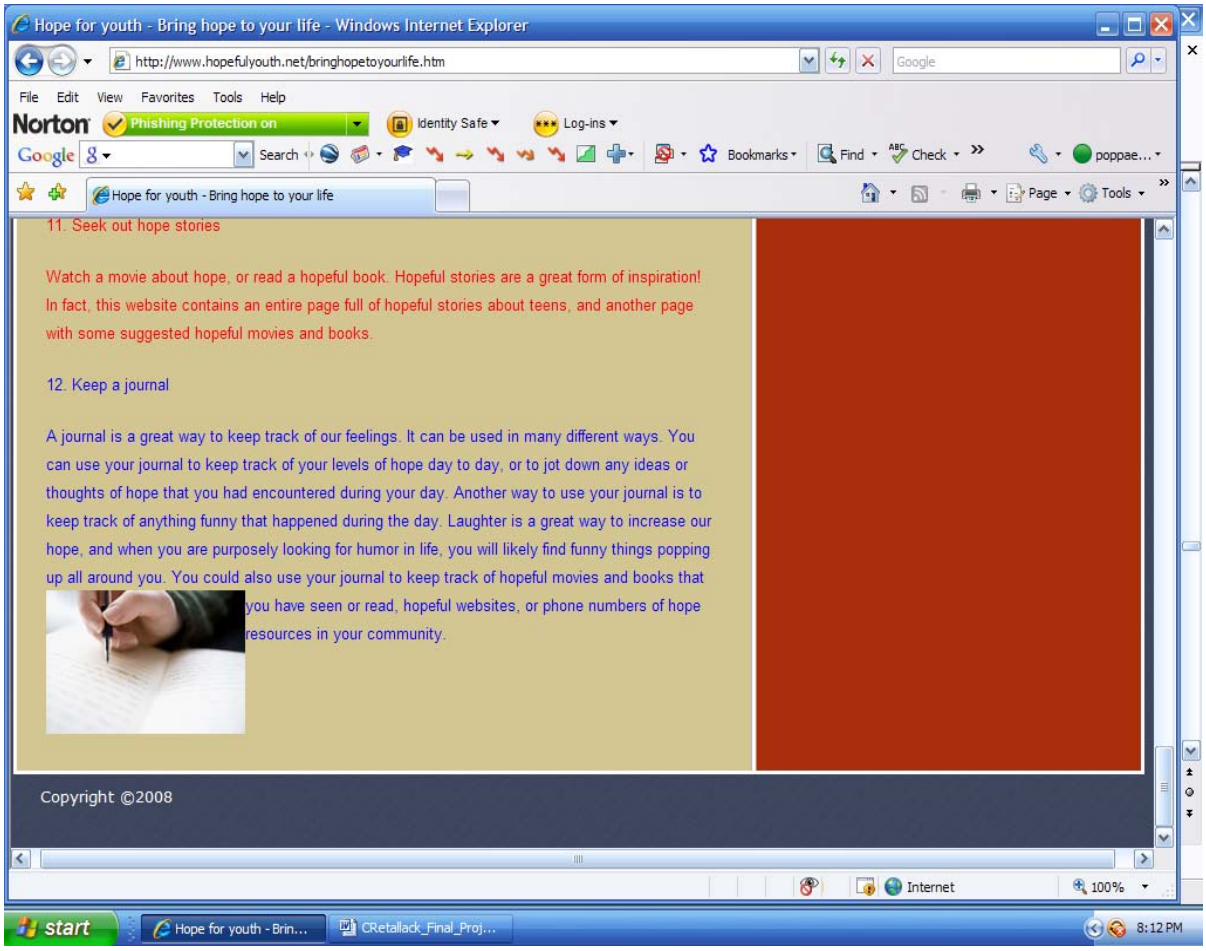



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2. Hope Box
A hope box is any type of box that is filled with items that are meaningful to you and represent hope in your life. For example, you might have books, sayings, mementos, pictures, magazine clippings, and other objects in your box. When you are feeling low, pulling out this box filled with hopeful items should help you start feeling better and less hopeless. You might even want to decorate the outside of your box in colors or with items that feel hopeful for you.
3. Join a team
Joining any kind of group or team can often help you feel more hopeful. Whenever two or more people join together for the same purpose, there is almost always a feeling of comraderie, excitement, and inevitably - hope! This group might mean a sports team, a dance troupe, a special interest group, or a charity.
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4. Help someone else
When you are able to do something kind for someone else, this lets the receiver of your kindness feel special and hopeful, and in turn allows you to feel more hopeful as well. Giving to others is often a great way for you to be able to receive hope in your life. It feels good to give, and that can only mean feeling more hopeful is inevitable.
5. Music
Music and music lyrics can be an inspiration of hope. If there is a song that inspires you and makes you feel hopeful, keep it nearby like on your MP3 player or a favorite CD. Listen to this song when you want to increase feelings of hopefulness. Writing your own song lyrics can also help to bring out some of your feelings and allow you to examine your level of hope. Writing a song of hope can help as well - sing this song for yourself when you are needing a boost.
For example, consider the lyrics from Jordin Sparks "One Step at a Time"
Hurry up and wait
So close, but so far away
Everything that you've always dreamed of
Close enough for you to taste
But you just can't touch
You wanna show the world, but no one knows your name yet
Wonder when and where and how you're gonna make it
You know you can if you get the chance
In your face as the door keeps slamming
Now you're feeling more and more frustrated
And you're getting all kind of impatient waiting
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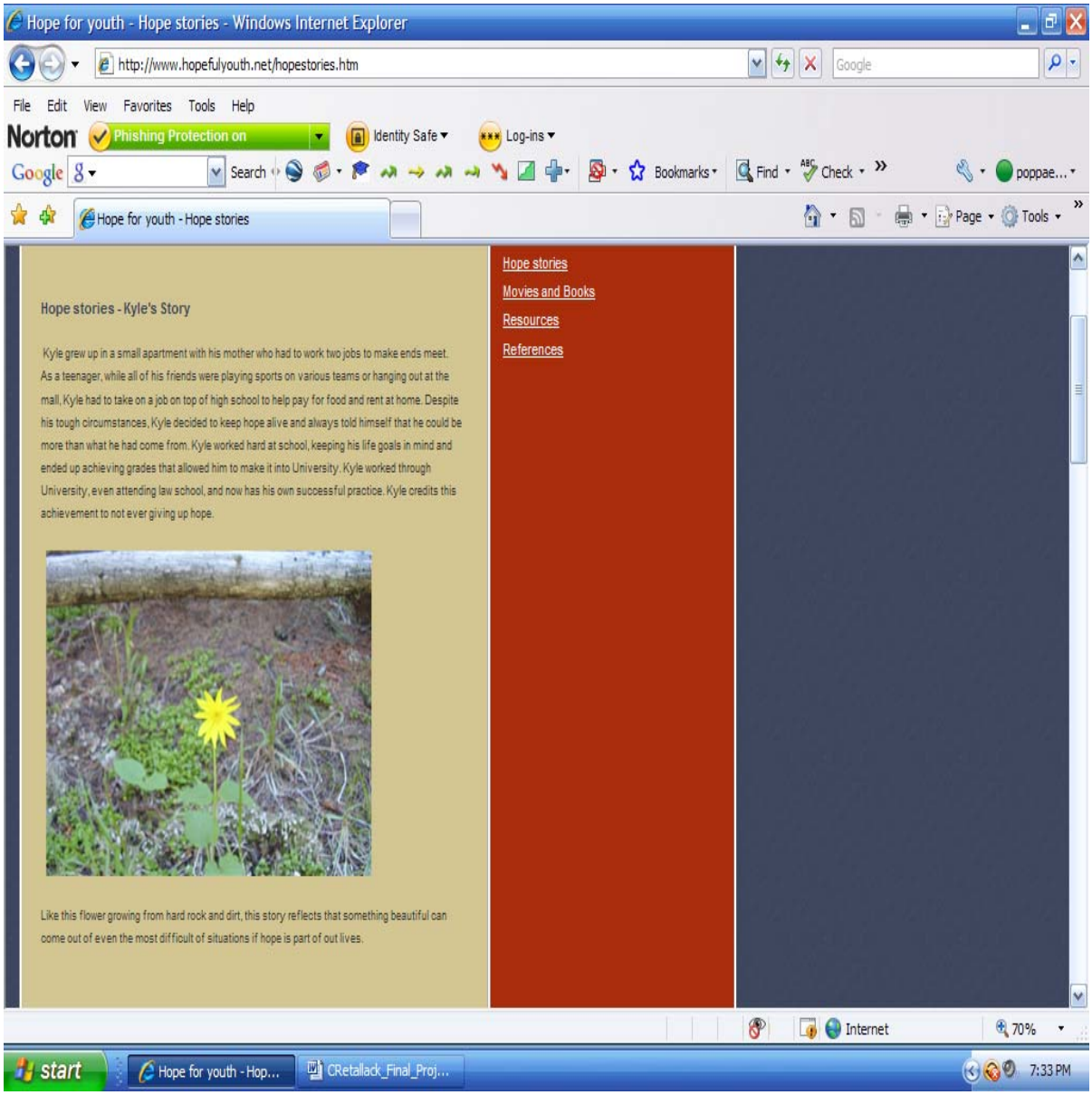

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[Chorus:]
We live and we learn to take
One step at a time
There's no need to rush
It's like learning to fly
Or falling in love
It's gonna happen and it's
Supposed to happen and we
Find the reasons why
One step at a time
6. Make a connection
Is there an adult in your life who means a lot to you? Having someone you look up to and can count on can do a lot for your level of hope. Look around - is there a parent, teacher, or other community person that you trust and can rely on? Nurture that relationship and watch your hope grow.
7. Set goals
Setting goals for ourselves can make us feel more hopeful. Start small, with goals that you know you can acheive. Make sure you are able to measure your goals - that means knowing how things will look for you when you have accomplished that goal. If you have a big goal in mind, try breaking it down into smaller goals so you don't get discouraged. Having something to strive for and a vision for the future is hopeful in itself, and the feeling you get from acheiving these goals is beyond description.
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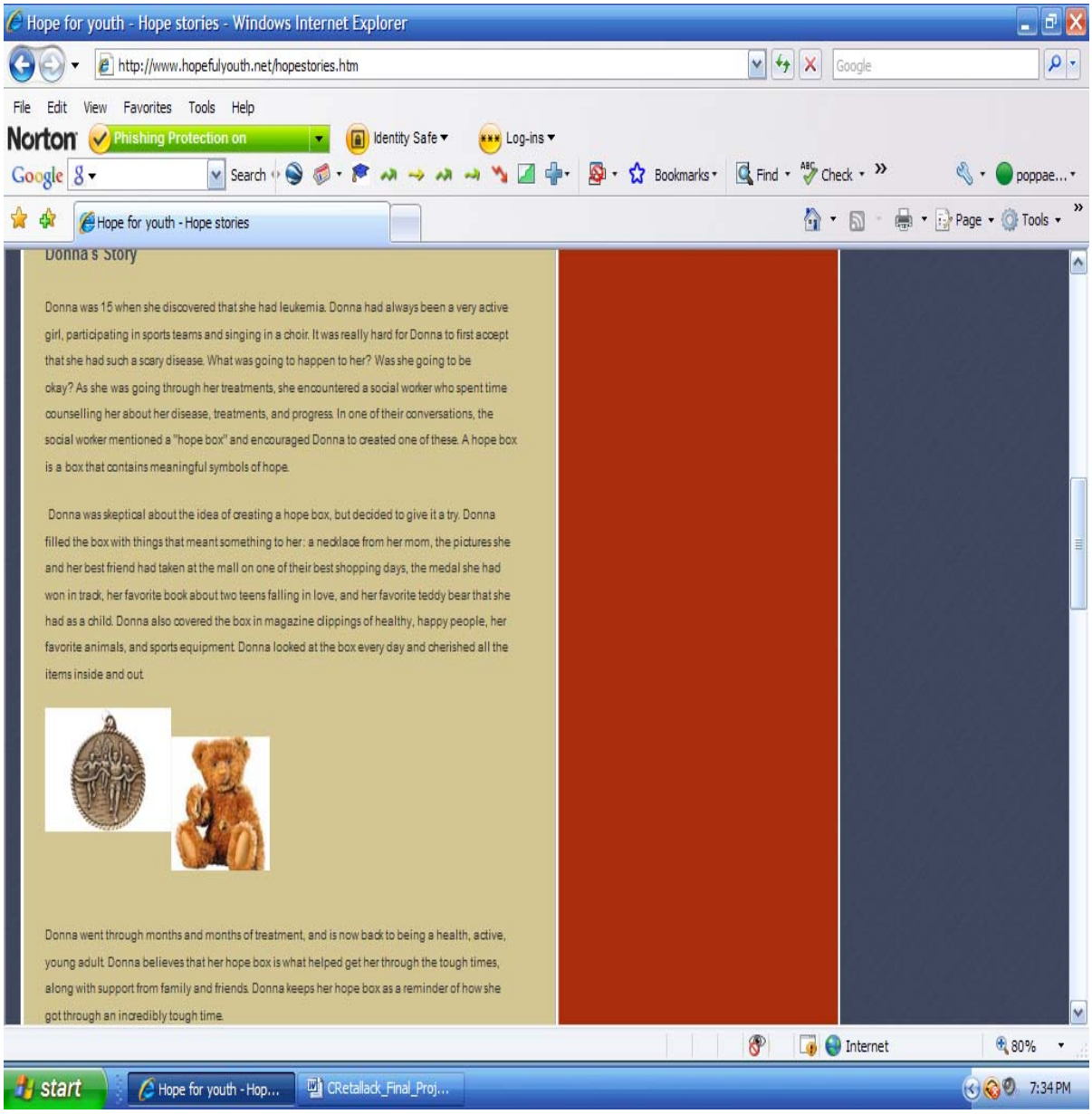

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Hope for youth - Bring hope to your life
8. Laugh a little
When you are laughing, you can't help but feel good. When you are feeling hopeless, try pulling out a joke book, searching for good jokes on the internet, watching a comedy on TV, or renting a silly movie. Laughing is a fun way to boost hopeful feelings in our life.
9. Volunteer
Nothing makes a person feel more hopeful than doing something selfless and kind for someone else. There are people dealing with different challenges all around us, and there are organizations and agencies just waiting for individuals to walk in the door and volunteer their time, skills, and services. Doing something good for others boosts our hope for ourselves and for others.
10. Make a hope collage
This can be done is several ways. Go through some magazines and find pictures that represent hope for you, then clip them out and place them together on a large paper or poster board. As an alternative, go outside and walk around the neighborhood and take pictures of things, people, or animals that represent hope for you. Put these on a large poster board or in a frame designed for multiple pictures. Keep your collage somewhere where you can look over at it whenever you feel a need to increase your level of hope.
11. Seek out hope stories
Watch a movie about hope, or read a hopeful book. Hopeful stories are a great form of inspiration! In fact, this website contains an entire page full of hopeful stories about teens, and another page with some suggested hopeful movies and books.
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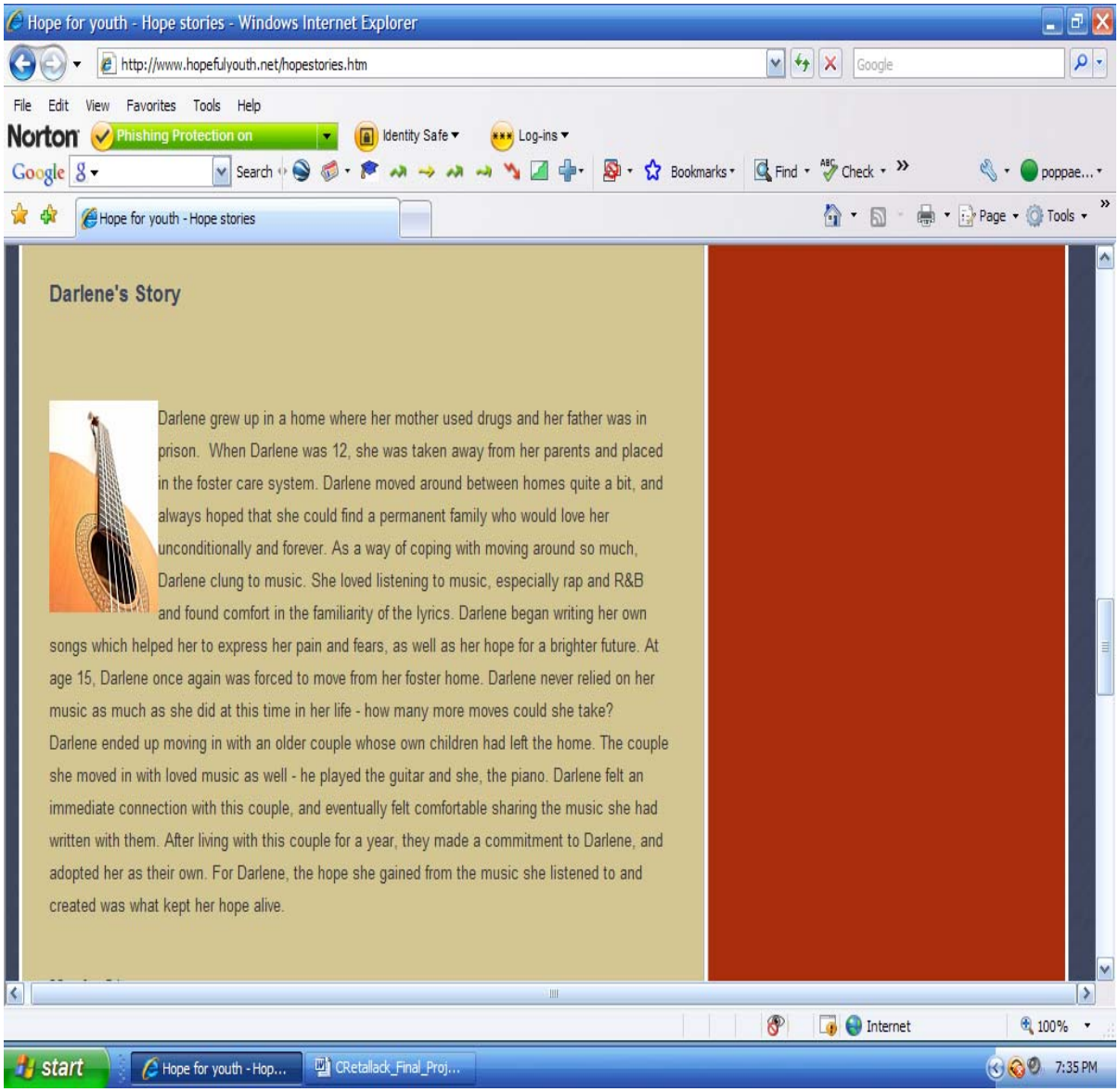


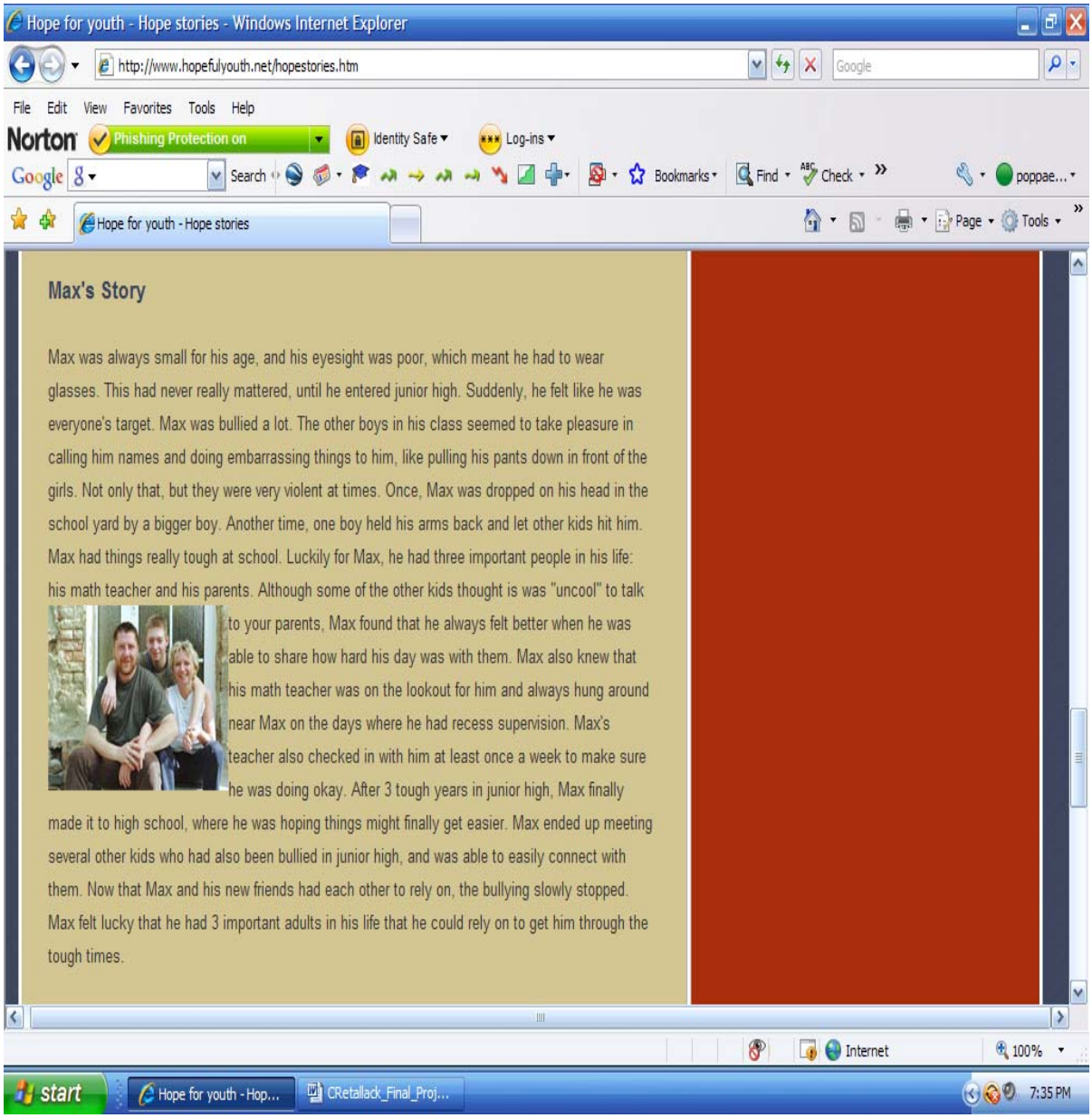
Hope Stories

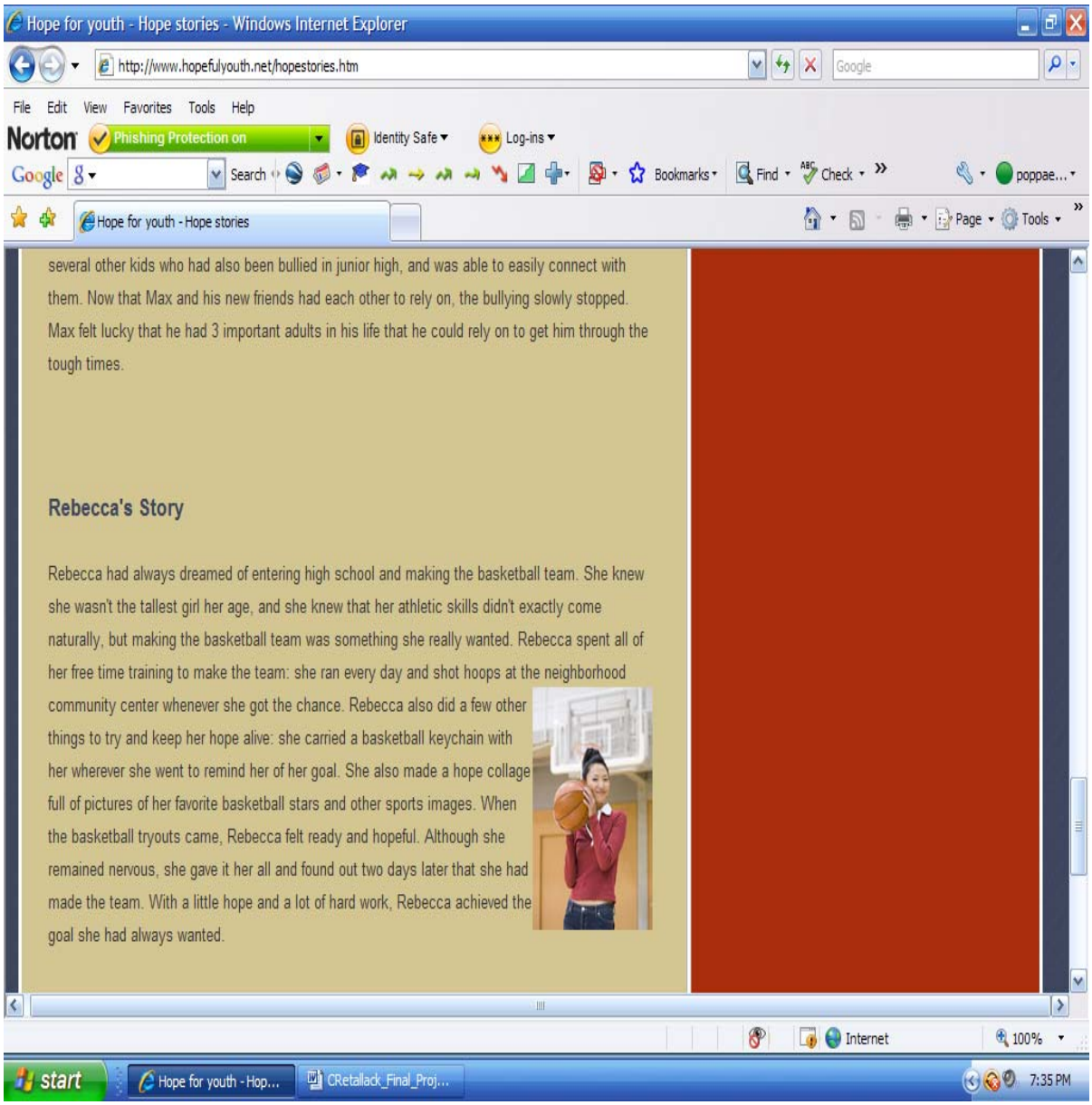
The fourth page on the website is entitled "Hope Stories" and tells six stories that demonstrate how hope has assisted adolescents in their lives. The stories are fictional but based on real life circumstances of anonymous sources. The stories illustrate some of the concepts discussed and described in the pages preceding the stories. Images are further used in this page to illustrate some of the ideas within the story. The page can be viewed here. The stories are intended to inspire and to demonstrate how hope can play a vital role in a person's life. The intention is to make the idea of hope more personal, real and relatable.

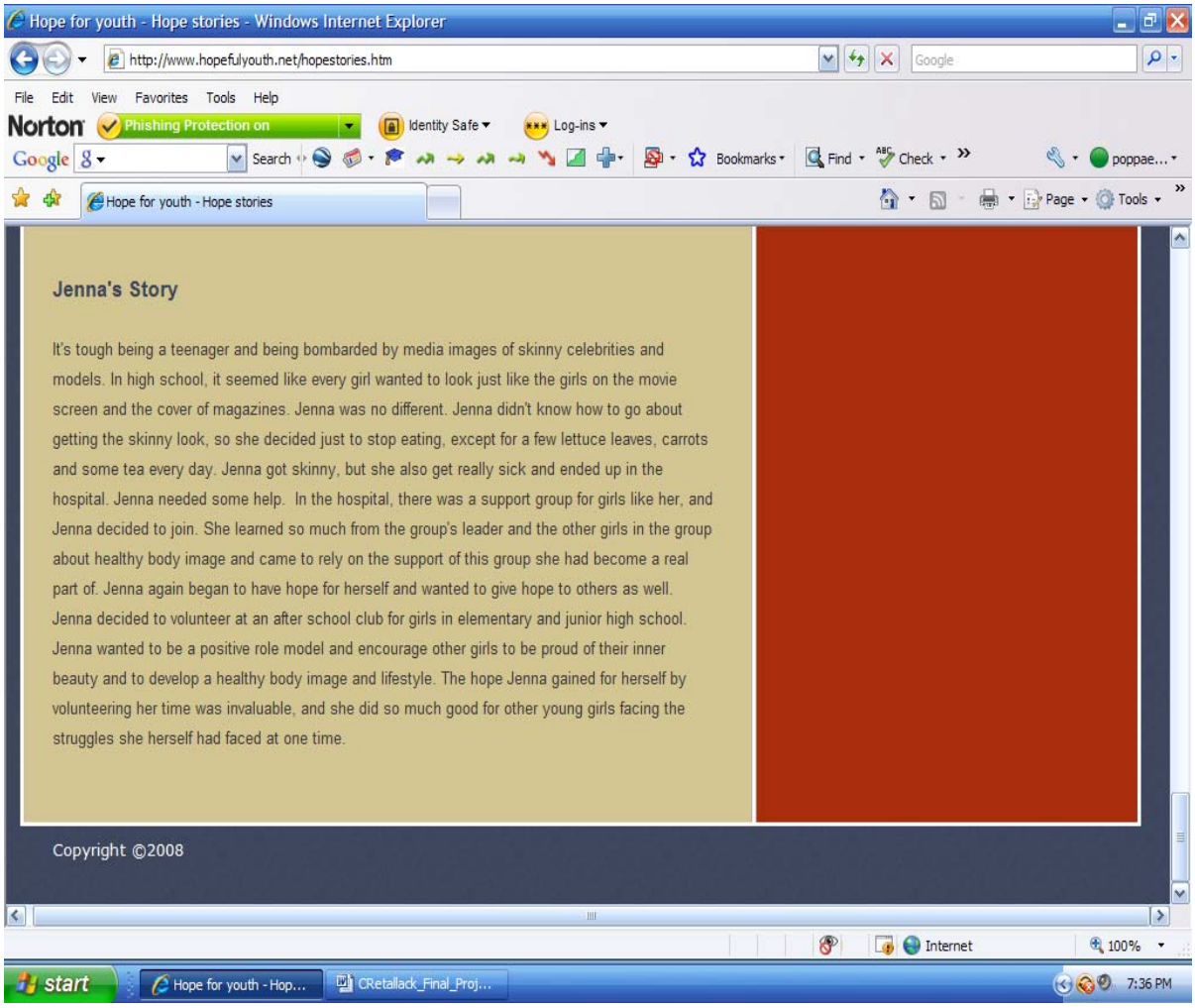

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Hope stories - Kyle's Story
Kyle grew up in a small apartment with his mother who had to work two jobs to make ends meet. As a teenager, while all of his friends were playing sports on various teams or hanging out at the mall, Kyle had to take on a job on top of high school to help pay for food and rent at home. Despite his tough circumstances, Kyle decided to keep hope alive and always told himself that he could be more than what he had come from. Kyle worked hard at school, keeping his life goals in mind and ended up achieving grades that allowed him to make it into University. Kyle worked through University, even attending law school, and now has his own successful practice. Kyle credits this achievement to not ever giving up hope.
Like this flower growing from hard rock and dirt, this story reflects that something beautiful can come out of even the most difficult of situations if hope is part of out lives.
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Donna's Story
Donna was 15 when she discovered that she had leukemia. Donna had always been a very active girl, participating in sports teams and singing in a choir. It was really hard for Donna to first accept that she had such a scary disease. What was going to happen to her? Was she going to be okay? As she was going through her treatments, she encountered a social worker who spent time counselling her about her disease, treatments, and progress. In one of their conversations, the social worker mentioned a "hope box" and encouraged Donna to created one of these. A hope box is a box that contains meaningful symbols of hope.
Donna was skeptical about the idea of creating a hope box, but decided to give it a try. Donna filled the box with things that meant something to her: a necklace from her mom, the pictures she and her best friend had taken at the mall on one of their best shopping days, the medal she had won in track, her favorite book about two teens falling in love, and her favorite teddy bear that she had as a child. Donna also covered the box in magazine clippings of healthy, happy people, her favorite animals, and sports equipment. Donna looked at the box every day and cherished all the items inside and out.
Donna went through months and months of treatment, and is now back to being a health, active, young adult. Donna believes that her hope box is what helped get her through the tough times, along with support from family and friends. Donna keeps her hope box as a reminder of how she got through an incredibly tough time.
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Darlene's Story
Darlene grew up in a home where her mother used drugs and her father was in prison. When Darlene was 12, she was taken away from her parents and placed in the foster care system. Darlene moved around between homes quite a bit, and always hoped that she could find a permanent family who would love her unconditionally and forever. As a way of coping with moving around so much, Darlene clung to music. She loved listening to music, especially rap and R&B and found comfort in the familiarity of the lyrics. Darlene began writing her own songs which helped her to express her pain and fears, as well as her hope for a brighter future. At age 15, Darlene once again was forced to move from her foster home. Darlene never relied on her music as much as she did at this time in her life - how many more moves could she take? Darlene ended up moving in with an older couple whose own children had left the home. The couple she moved in with loved music as well - he played the guitar and she, the piano. Darlene felt an immediate connection with this couple, and eventually felt comfortable sharing the music she had written with them. After living with this couple for a year, they made a commitment to Darlene, and adopted her as their own. For Darlene, the hope she gained from the music she listened to and created was what kept her hope alive.
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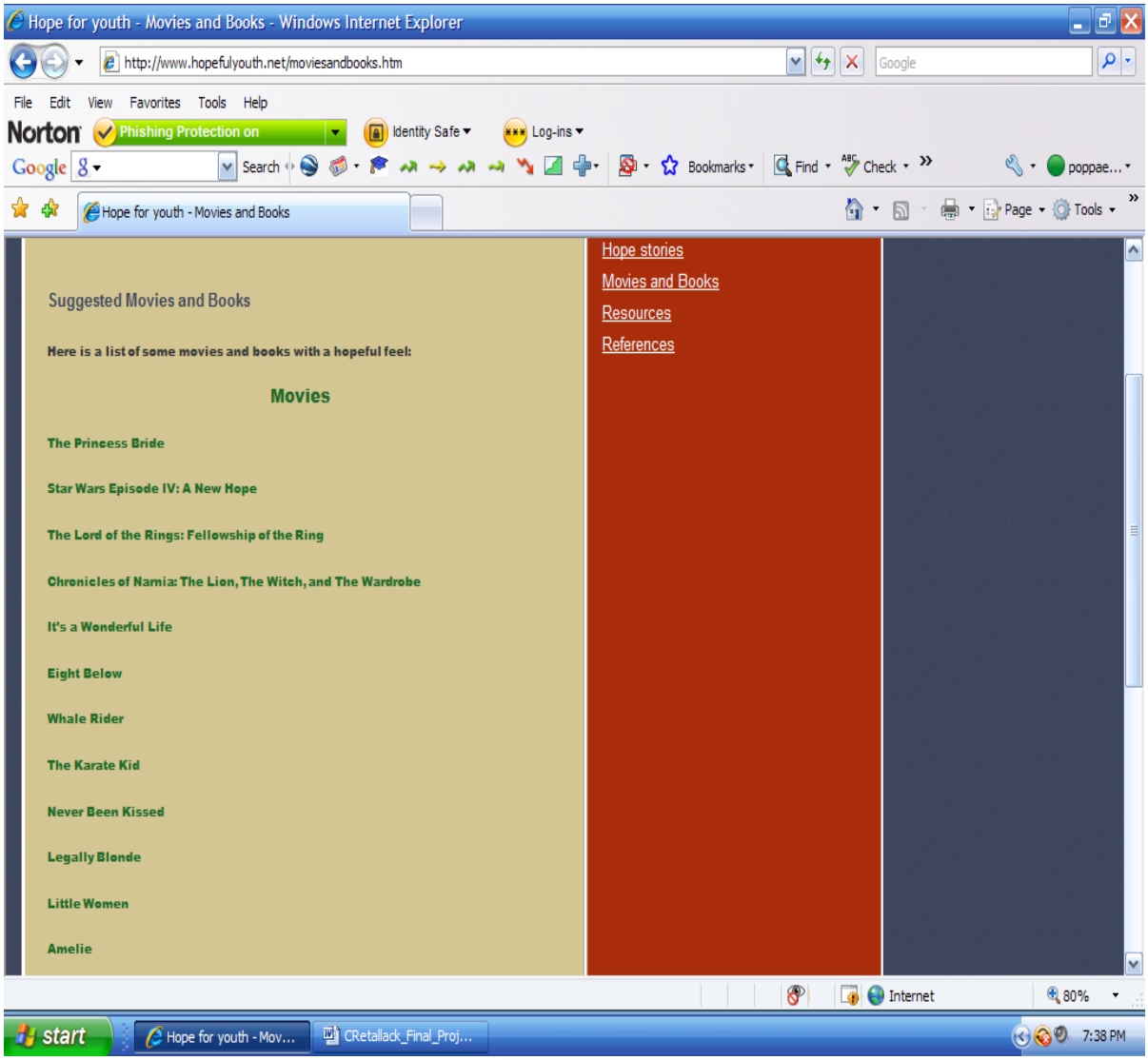

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Page
Tools
Max's Story
Max was always small for his age, and his eyesight was poor, which meant he had to wear glasses. This had never really mattered, until he entered junior high. Suddenly, he felt like he was everyone's target. Max was bullied a lot. The other boys in his class seemed to take pleasure in calling him names and doing embarrassing things to him, like pulling his pants down in front of the girls. Not only that, but they were very violent at times. Once, Max was dropped on his head in the school yard by a bigger boy. Another time, one boy held his arms back and let other kids hit him. Max had things really tough at school. Luckily for Max, he had three important people in his life: his math teacher and his parents. Although some of the other kids thought is was "uncool" to talk
to your parents, Max found that he always felt better when he was able to share how hard his day was with them. Max also knew that his math teacher was on the lookout for him and always hung around near Max on the days where he had recess supervision. Max's teacher also checked in with him at least once a week to make sure he was doing okay. After 3 tough years in junior high, Max finally made it to high school, where he was hoping things might finally get easier. Max ended up meeting several other kids who had also been bullied in junior high, and was able to easily connect with them. Now that Max and his new friends had each other to rely on, the bullying slowly stopped. Max felt lucky that he had 3 important adults in his life that he could rely on to get him through the tough times.
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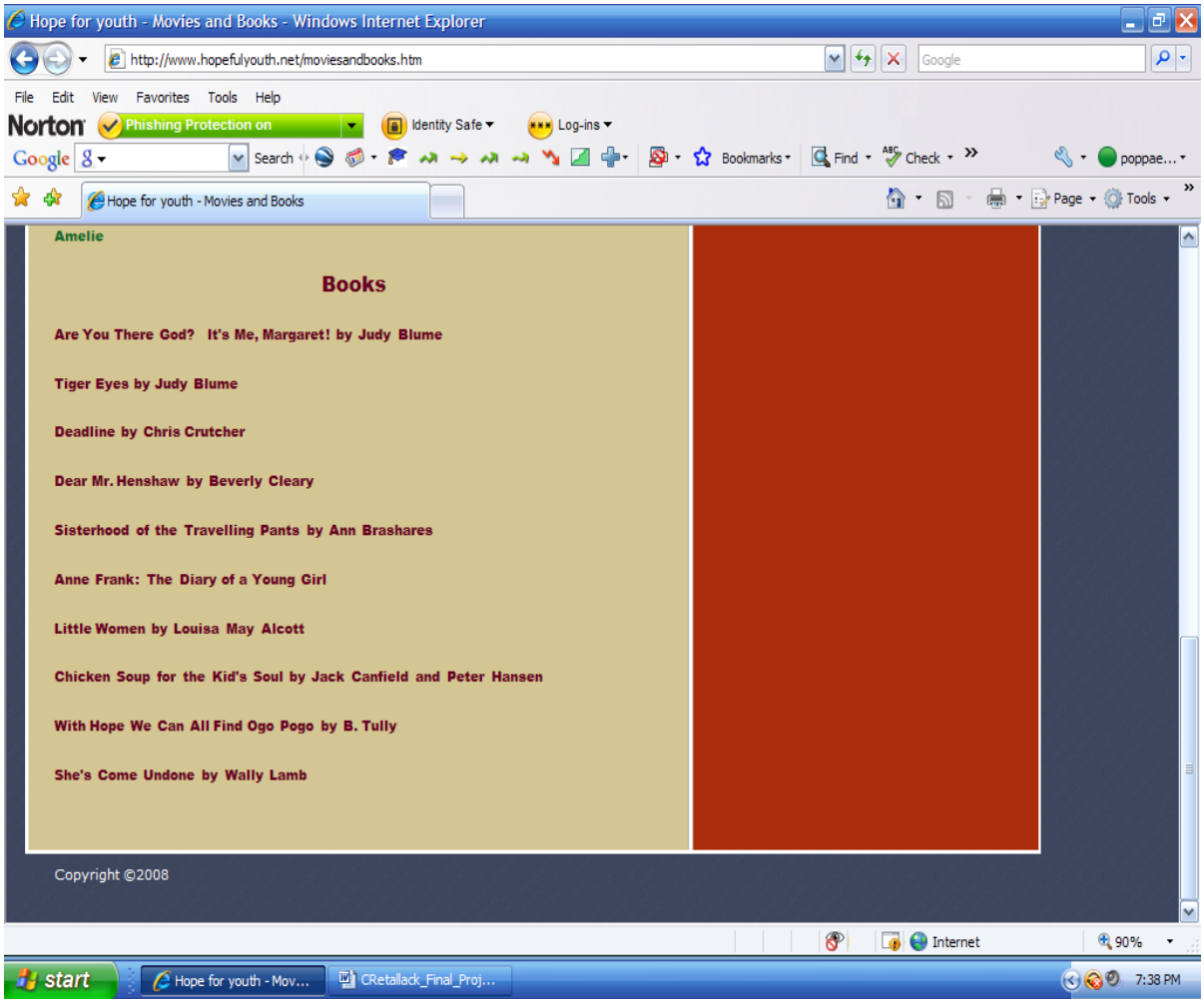

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Hope for youth - Hope stories
several other kids who had also been bullied in junior high, and was able to easily connect with them. Now that Max and his new friends had each other to rely on, the bullying slowly stopped. Max felt lucky that he had 3 important adults in his life that he could rely on to get him through the tough times.
Rebecca's Story
Rebecca had always dreamed of entering high school and making the basketball team. She knew she wasn't the tallest girl her age, and she knew that her athletic skills didn't exactly come naturally, but making the basketball team was something she really wanted. Rebecca spent all of her free time training to make the team: she ran every day and shot hoops at the neighborhood community center whenever she got the chance. Rebecca also did a few other things to try and keep her hope alive: she carried a basketball keychain with her wherever she went to remind her of her goal. She also made a hope collage full of pictures of her favorite basketball stars and other sports images. When the basketball tryouts came, Rebecca felt ready and hopeful. Although she remained nervous, she gave it her all and found out two days later that she had made the team. With a little hope and a lot of hard work, Rebecca achieved the goal she had always wanted.
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Movies and Books

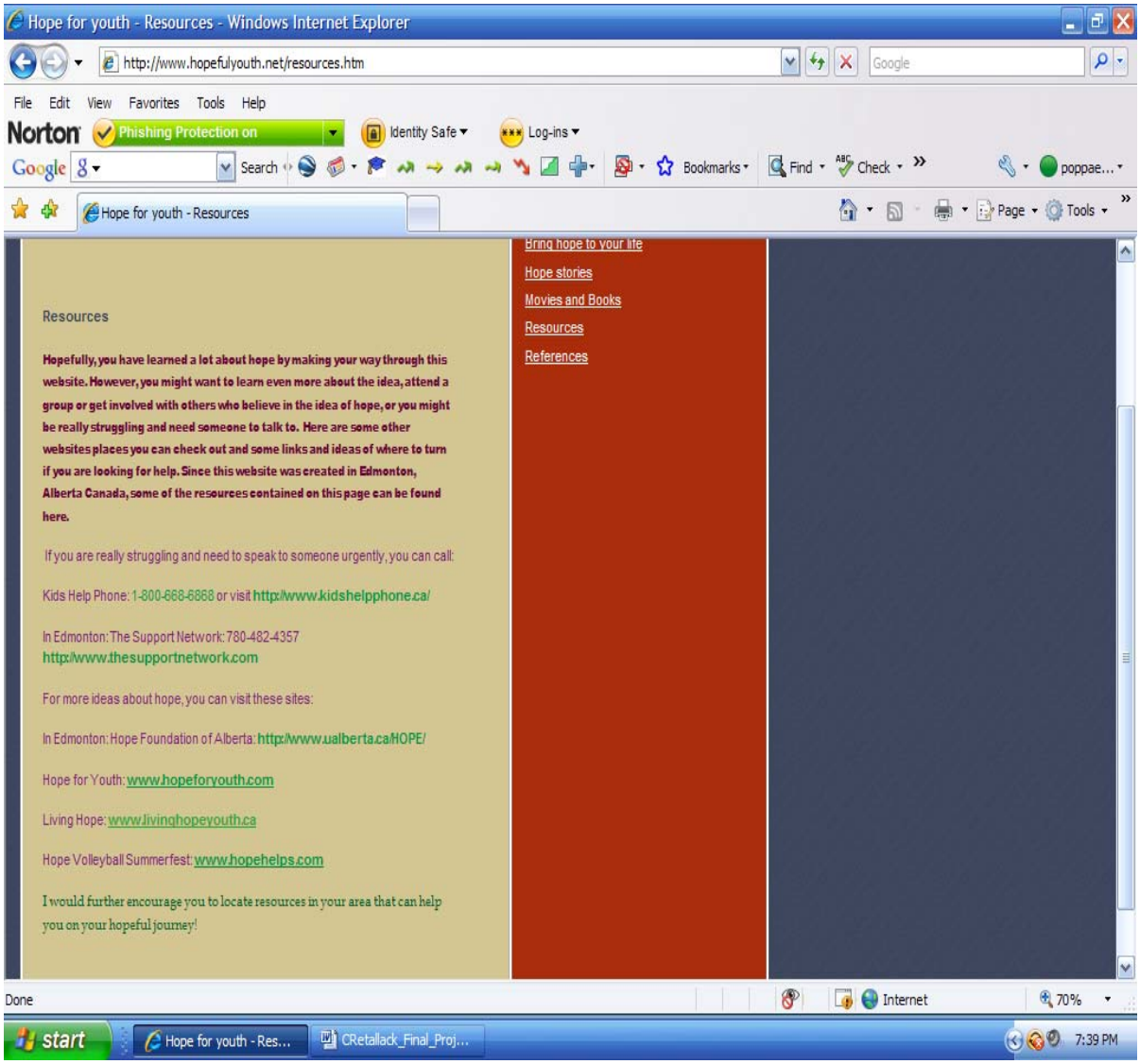
Within the page entitled "Bring hope to your life", one of the suggested activities is to watch hopeful movies and read books with messages of hope. As a result, the "Movies and Books" page was created to assist adolescents in starting this process. Several hopeful movies and books are listed here as suggestions. It is hoped that this will serve as a starting point for adolescents who will then be able to start seeking out and identifying other hopeful movies and books.


Hope for youth - Movies and Books - Windows Internet Explorer
http://www.hopefulyouth.net/moviesandbooks.htm
Hope for youth - Movies and Books
Hope stories
Movies and Books
Resources
References
Suggested Movies and Books
Here is a list of some movies and books with a hopeful feel:
Movies
The Princess Bride
Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope
The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring
Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe
It's a Wonderful Life
Eight Below
Whale Rider
The Karate Kid
Never Been Kissed
Legally Blonde
Little Women
Amelie
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Resources

The "Resources" page on the website serves to connect youth to other resources found mainly on the internet that focus on the idea of hope. Several youth hope programs were uncovered in the research for this project and many are included within this section. These sites do not contain any information about what hope is or how it can play a role in the lives of adolescents. They are simply sites where teens can register for programs that have a hopeful component, making the website created for this project seemingly unique.



References

The references section of the website includes all references used in the literature review completed for this project. This page shows where the website content originated. The page is not shown here, as all references are included at the end of this paper.

Dissemination

Adolescents will be able to learn about the website by completing an internet search using keywords such as hope, youth, and hopeful youth in popular search engines such as Google and Yahoo! Further to this, staff members from The Hope Foundation of Alberta are

aware of the website and have reported that they will direct youth and other counsellors to this website. The link to this website has also been sent to various counsellors within the Edmonton area as many had expressed an interest in using this site as part of their work with youth. Sending information about the website to school boards in the Edmonton area and to the Child and Family Services Crisis Unit in Edmonton is further being considered. . Also a flyer will be created to send to youth drop in centres such as the Youth Co-op near Whyte Avenue in Edmonton and the Boys and Girls Clubs in the Edmonton area, where many youth tend to congregate.

Website Follow-Up

The domain name for this website has been purchased for a minimum of two years, and I plan to update the site regularly as any new information about hope or new hope resources emerge. The site will be reviewed and maintained monthly to ensure that information remains current and is of interest to youth. As I continue to make new connections within the counselling world, I will continue to direct counsellors to the site as well.

CHAPTER V

Synthesis and Implications

Project Utility

The hope-focussed website created for this project was designed to provide adolescents with an online resource for discovering the concept of hope and how hope can play a role in their lives. More specifically, the site allows adolescents to: 1) learn various ideas behind hope theory; 2) discover concrete ways in which they can make hope a part of their lives; 3) learn from others' hope stories; and 4) be connected to other resources that utilize the experience of hope.

The different pages of the website will allow the youth to navigate the site and decide which pages will have more value for them, whether it is learning about hope and hope theory, discovering how to allow hope into their lives, learning about how others have benefited from hope theory, or discovering other hope and counselling resources. If the viewer is interested in certain sections and not others, it is simple for them to locate the areas they are interested in and focus their attention on the specific page that contains this information.

The website is not intended to be an online counselling website, but it does direct youth to other resources, such as the Kids Help Phone, The Hope Foundation of Alberta, and The Support Network if they are looking for more support and counselling. Although the site contains links to other websites on the internet that promote hope-focussed programs, most of the counselling resources are found in Alberta. On the site, however, adolescents are encouraged to research similar resources in their area. It is indicated within the website that

the purpose of the site is to allow adolescents to learn about hope and encourages them to think about hope as it relates to their lives.

Further to being a resource for youth, the site can also be utilized by other professionals working with youth who are interested in incorporating the idea of hope into their practice. The ideas about hope theory, hope-focussed strategies, and bringing hope into one's life can be generalized into other practices such as individual counselling, support groups, school groups, and even extracurricular and recreational activities.

Although the project is aimed at adolescents, the ideas encompassed within the website could be applicable to other age groups as well. Adults could certainly benefit from the concepts found within the hope website as much as youth, although the language contained within the site is somewhat less age-appropriate. Hope theory can be generalized across age groups, and this site is no exception. If an adult were searching for ideas about hope and were to come across this site, it would be fair to say that they might find some of the answers they were looking for. If nothing else, the site could easily serve as a starting point for adults seeking information about hope.

Limitations

Although the project has widespread, generalizable utility, it also comes with certain limitations. First, the site was designed as an information site for adolescents, not a counselling site. With that in mind, youth would need to look for other sources for more one on one help or for someone or somewhere that could assist them if they needed more help than what is offered on the website. Although the site provides certain links to hope-related resources and encourages youth to seek further assistance if necessary, the site is not able to serve as an online counselling service for teens.

Another limitation with regards to resources is that while one part of the website makes reference to resources, the resources noted are primarily limited to Alberta. The site does provide links to websites promoting hope-focussed programs for teens, but considering that the internet is available worldwide, it would be impossible to list international counselling and hope-focussed resources. Finding all of such resources and finding the space to encompass these within the website would be an impossible task. Since this website creator resides in Edmonton, Alberta and is familiar with resources here, these are the ones that have been included.

Further to this, it might have been beneficial or appropriate for the site to have some sort of forum for youth to express their ideas about hope, pose questions to others, and start a discussion about hope and how hope has or has not played a part in their lives. Although considered, such a forum was not constructed due to ethical constraints and the ability for this forum to be managed by a professional or the site's creator.

Personal Observations and Learning

This project, for me, involved a great deal of personal learning. Although I had been exposed to hope theory and hopeful thinking from attending in-services through The Hope Foundation of Alberta and completing a practicum at this same location, I still had a great deal to learn about hope. This project has taught me that learning about hope is an ongoing process and I will likely continue to learn about this concept throughout my career.

As I completed this project, I had many personal challenges to meet as well, including illnesses of family members and struggles with pregnancy. Although I had some knowledge about hope theory, this project allowed me to learn more about this and be able to apply this to my own life. I was able to put into practice many ideas about hope. I have created a hope

box, joined a mother's group, and have several songs on a play list that represent hope for me. These efforts have assisted me in meeting the challenges I have faced over the past year or so and I will continue to turn to these strategies and others in the future.

The literature review presented some challenges as there were so many different aspects to research: hope theory, adolescents, adolescence and hope theory, adolescents and internet use, and past health and wellness websites created for adolescents. Further to this, there was the internet search that needed to be completed to determine the types of hope websites currently available to teens, if any. Due to their depth and breadth, these reviews turned out to be the most time-consuming pieces of the project.

Another challenge was learning to develop a website. Although I had dabbled in website design in the past, I had not completed a full website on my own, making this project somewhat more daunting than I had originally thought. Luckily, I was able to find a website that assisted me step-by-step in the website's creation. I was able to learn about menu bars, templates, inserting graphics and images, editing, publishing, and locating and purchasing a domain name. This learning should also serve me well in the future.

Conclusions

Adolescence is a time of transition and change for youth. Every adolescent experiences this time differently. Whether adolescence is a time filled with opportunities or challenges, hope is a concept that can prove beneficial in the lives of youth. Since adolescents are adept at technology and will often seek answers online before seeking assistance from professionals or other adults, it would seem that online wellness websites for youth should be becoming more of the norm. For this project, a website was created where youth can turn to discover what hope can mean for them, how it can play a role in their lives,

how hope has worked for others, and where they can turn for further answers about hope and further assistance. It is hoped that this site will be widely viewed by youth and also utilized by professional working with youth who want to incorporate hope into their practice.

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