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## Safety sitter class

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**Safety Sitter Class**

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**CHHS 400**

**Senior Capstone**

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### **Key Words**

Safety sitter, home alone safety, latchkey children.

### **Abstract**

According to statistical information, 40.8% of children living below poverty level and 35% of children living above poverty level must spend part of their day without adult supervision (Johnson, 2002). These children are vulnerable to physical injury, fear, and loneliness, and they must face emergencies alone. However, many agencies provide safety information and coping strategies for children in these situations. One such agency, The Lyceum of Monterey County, has collaborated with a local fire chief to provide a “safety sitter” class. After two decades of offering this class, the Lyceum has recognized the popularity of this class and has identified a need to recruit new fire fighters and other public safety professionals to teach the class in various locations.

### **Executive Summary**

The Lyceum of Monterey County is an educational non-profit organization with a mission to “inspire a life long love of learning.” They serve all children of Monterey County from pre-k to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They offer public mentor classes that cover a wide variety of subjects including art, science, culture, sports, hobbies, and safety. In addition to the public mentor classes, they have “contact classes” with local schools that offer music, science, art, and homework help that serve as after school programs. They also host three county wide academic competitions; Spelling Bee, History Day, and Mock Trial. The academic year of 2006-2007 is the first year that they have taken interns from the Collaborative Health and Human Services major.

One of the public mentor classes offered by the Lyceum is called “Safety Sitter.” This class is offered to children in the fifth grade or higher and it is designed to help these children learn how to prevent or handle emergencies when they are home alone, watching siblings, or babysitting for money. They learn skills to avoid common household dangers, first aid skills, discipline skills, and how to handle situations with strangers, prowlers, and phone calls. The staff at the Lyceum recognize how important this class is to the community because there are many children who are left without adult supervision. They also identified a need to expand the class to serve more children. The class is only

offered twice a session and small class sizes and remote locations make it difficult for many children to attend.

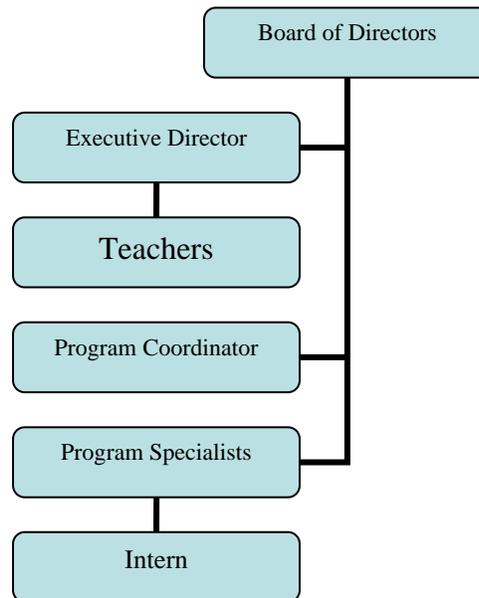
The capstone project that was assigned to me, the field placement intern was to recruit more instructors to teach the class. This would allow them to offer more frequently and in other locations so that more children may attend. My task was to identify those in the community who might have the qualifications and the facilities to offer the class, contact them and propose the idea to them. I was also required by my capstone class to review literature concerning this topic, and from that assignment, I decided to attend the class to see if it covered the topics highlighted in my literature review.

### **Agency Information**

The Lyceum of Monterey County is an educational non profit agency with a mission to “Inspire a life long love of learning.” They offer “public mentor” classes in a wide range of subjects including science, art, culture, career information, sports, and safety. They host three countywide academic competitions: spelling bee, mock trial, and history day. They also contract with local schools throughout Monterey County to provide after school music, science, and tutoring programs. The population that the Lyceum serves are school aged children including preschool aged children.

The Lyceum has a small staff, including an executive director, a full time program coordinator, and two part time program specialists. They contract with an independent bookkeeper for their accounting needs. They have a twelve member board of directors and an advisory board as well. The contract classes are taught by paid teacher, but the public mentor classes are taught mostly by volunteers who want to share their hobbies with children. As an intern, I worked mainly with the program specialists to assist them with the events that they had to coordinate. However, for my capstone project, I worked with the program coordinator and one of the teachers.

### **Lyceum Organizational Chart**



### **Problem History and Characteristics**

Since the increase in the rates of two income households, there is also an increase in children who must spend at least part of their days caring for themselves, and sometimes caring for siblings without any adult supervision. This is a routine in the lives of many children who's parents are both at work or who is raised by a single parent. According to Johnson (2002) 40.8% of children below poverty level, and 35% of children above the poverty level are faced with this situation. Children as young as six are routinely left alone after school. These children are faced with some problems that can be potentially dangerous. Without the experience of an adult, these children may injure themselves while performing routine tasks such as preparing a meal. For example, there is a danger of fire for some children who use the stove unsupervised. These children also report feelings of fear and loneliness according to Bell (1999). When children are home alone, they are more vulnerable in situations with strangers. In these situations, it is vital that children learn how to handle dangerous situations so they may avoid, or seek help with emergencies.

There are many resources to guide children through their time alone. Many agencies offer classes for children in this situation. The Lyceum has one such class

called “Safety Sitter” offered to children in fifth grade and older. This class is taught by Mid Carmel Valley Fire Chief, Sydney Reede and has been picked up in Salinas by another fire fighter. It is offered once a semester by each instructor. The class size is small, and due to its’ popularity, there is often a waiting list for children who want to attend. Both the Executive Director and the Program Coordinator expressed a need to recruit additional instructors from fire departments to teach the class. This way, more children would be able to attend the class. Furthermore, the classes would be offered in locations that would be more convenient for families who may find it difficult to travel to Carmel or Salinas.

### **Capstone Project Description**

As stated in the Collaborative Health and Human Services 400 (Senior Capstone) class reader the purpose of this project is to A. integrate key pieces of my undergraduate education, B. reflect something that is meaningful to me, and C. make a lasting impact on my field placement site. These requirements were explained to my mentor, and that is how we came up with the project.

After recognizing the importance of the Safety Sitter class, and identifying the need to expand it to better serve the community, the Lyceum assigned me with the task of recruiting more instructors to teach the class. My first task was to identify potential qualified instructors. I searched the websites of county and city fire departments for public safety departments and education departments to find contact information. I also decided to contact some police departments with public safety programs to expand my pool of potential instructors. After gathering this information, I contacted the people that were identified by phone and proposed the idea to them.

My initial goal was to find someone who would be able to commit to teaching the class in the Spring session. They would have had to give me their answer by the beginning of December in order for the program coordinator to add the information to their spring catalogue. Yet, if I did not find anyone who would be able to make that commitment within that time frame, I would be able to find someone who could commit to it for the fall session.

During this process, I kept track of all the people that I called and what form of contact I had with them (i.e. if I left a voicemail message, if I left a message with a

secretary or coworker, or if I talked directly to them.) I also kept track of who returned my calls when I left a message. Since I was only at the Lyceum twice a week, I left my home phone number and my Lyceum email address as alternative contact information.

I contacted 18 agencies in all, and about five of these people returned my call. It was difficult to reach an actual person when I called most of them. Out of all the fire departments and public safety educators I called, I received positive responses from three of them. Gonzales fire department, Marina public safety department, and Seaside fire department all expressed interest in the class. However, only Seaside actually went through with a proposal to teach the class.

Although I did not get a commitment from Gonzales fire department or Marina public safety to teach the class, the Lyceum did benefit from these contacts. After speaking with me, the representative from Gonzales fire department informed the program coordinator of the city's new recreational facility and connected her to the newly hired recreational leader for the city of Gonzales. As a result, the Lyceum was able to hold three Spring classes at the recreational facility. Although this contact did not result in a new safety sitter class, it was still a positive outcome because the Lyceum was able to expand and serve an area of the county that they had not yet reached.

When I contacted the public safety officer for Marina, he was not able to commit to teaching the class, however, he was very interested in the Lyceum's programs. He informed me that he was the president of the Monterey County Peace Officer's Association and that in that capacity, he would be able to help the Lyceum with a donation. He informed me that the association has an annual fundraising dinner from which proceeds would benefit a local agency that contributes to law enforcement or public safety in some form. He told me that they had not yet chose an agency and he asked if the Lyceum was interested in and qualified to accept such a donation. I informed him that in addition to the Safety Sitter Class, the Lyceum offered a "Crime Scene Investigation" class to teach children about detective skills. With this information, he and the other members chose to donate the proceeds to the Lyceum and in March, my mentor attended the dinner and received an \$850.00 donation.

Seaside fire department was, however, interested in teaching the class. They were unable to commit to teaching it in Spring because they could not propose the idea to the

chief until after the Spring catalogue went to press. The chief did approve the idea and when they informed me of this, the next step was for them to get trained. They had already talked with the Salinas Safety Sitter instructor who showed them the materials and they felt prepared to teach the class without attending the training. They said that they would have to pay someone overtime in order for them to attend the class and that, as fire fighters, they were already qualified to teach the basic safety skills that the class covered. In this case, they could not justify the expenditure, but they were still willing to teach the class. The program coordinator said that because they were worried about alienating the Safety Sitter instructor, Seaside fire department had to come up with a different title and description for the catalogue. Seaside fire department's representative told me that, out of respect for the Safety Sitter instructor, they would still like to ask permission to teach the class.

In addition to recruiting instructors for the class, it was determined that, for my own educational experience, I should attend the class. This would give me a chance to learn the material and perhaps better represent the information when I propose the idea to other professionals. Finally it would give me an idea of how well the class covers issues that concern children who are left alone.

I attended the spring session of the class. I observed the discussions, participated in the demonstrations, and collected the materials given to the students. I also compared the class with information I had read in the literature review that was required for this project by my capstone professor. I wanted to determine whether or not this class covered some of the emotional and psychological issues concerning children who are left without adult supervision and well as the physical hazards of the situation.

### **Evaluation**

In order to determine whether or not this project has met its stated objectives, it must be evaluated. As I mentioned before, this project must integrate key pieces of my undergraduate education, reflect something that is meaningful to me, and create a lasting contribution to my field placement. Therefore, I decided to evaluate, both the process of recruiting the instructors, and the class itself to determine whether or not it met the stated purpose.

The process was a reflection on some of the professional skills that I have accumulated during my undergraduate education. Two particular skills were demonstrated, communication, and collaboration. During this process, I had to contact each potential instructor as a representative of the Lyceum, rather than as a student. I also had to propose the idea in a clear and concise manner so that I could express my intentions without taking too much of their time. Also this process reflected the ideals of collaboration because I was asking the potential instructors not only to collaborate with the Lyceum, but with the existing Safety Sitter instructors as well.

Evaluating the class reflected ideas that were important to me. Concern for the safety of children and the expansion of resources and information for families is a personal interest. The information that I learned in my literature review, as well as the information I learned while attending the class, has helped me in my personal life because I have a daughter and I am challenged to find appropriate child care for her. It also helped me in my job with Residential Life because it became a guide for me to help plan a special event called “Week of the Young Child. The class itself covered a wide range of issues, including fire prevention, first aid, dealing with strangers and other scary situations, and discipline. After attending the class, I had a greater knowledge of the types of concerns one must consider before he or she leaves a child alone, with an older sibling, or with a young babysitter. This information helped me to become a better parent, and it will help me in my future career because I will be more aware of these issues.

Finally, looking at the outcome, I found that this project did have a lasting impact on the Lyceum of Monterey County. It made other agencies more aware of the Lyceum and its’ programs at the least. Furthermore, the donation of money from the Monterey County Peace Officer’s Association and the connection to a facility in a new area has helped the Lyceum expand their resources. These contributions have increased the Lyceum’s capacity to serve the community.

### **Major Learning Outcomes and CSUMB Vision Statement**

As stated before, one of the main purposes of this project is to reflect key pieces of my undergraduate education. Part a key piece of this education is the “major learning outcomes.” These are areas in which students are to develop knowledge, skills, and

attitudes. There are thirteen of these major learning outcomes in the Collaborative Health and Human Services program. My project reflected four of these outcomes: collaboration, professional communication, information management, and knowledge of health and human services.

I mentioned above, how this project reflected professional communication and collaboration. By representing the Lyceum and proposing the project to other professionals, I reflected professional communication. Also, by attempting to bring together the Lyceum, the current Safety Sitter instructor, and other agencies, I demonstrated collaboration.

I also demonstrated information management during this process. The literature review process as well as my attempts to identify potential qualified instructors helped me develop my research skills. Identifying the potential instructors also increased my knowledge of health and human services. This process required me to look into various health and human services agencies to see what services they offered. This project reflects some aspects of the California State University at Monterey Bay (CSUMB) Vision Statement as well. The vision for CSUMB states: “The University will be... distinguished by partnerships with existing institutions...cross institutional boundaries for innovative instruction...” My project demonstrates this value because it is a collaboration between CSUMB (as represented by myself), The Lyceum (who gave me my field learning experience) and various fire departments (who have or may teach the Safety Sitter Class). Furthermore, this collaboration is meant to expand educational resources for the children in the community.

### **Conclusion**

As the first CHHS intern with the Lyceum of Monterey County I feel that this project has had a positive impact on the Lyceum. Aside from the donation of money and the connection with a new facility, this experience has increased the Lyceum’s visibility. Furthermore, this project supports their mission to “Promote a life long love of learning.” By supporting the education of college students through field placements and by providing a place for me to complete my capstone project, the Lyceum has expanded its’ services beyond the pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grade population while receiving some services as well.

