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Stress Management in the Kitchen

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Author Note:

Haley Rosano, Department of Collaborative Health and Human Services, California State University Monterey Bay. This capstone project, *Stress Management in the Kitchen* was a series of educational workshops, through Catholic Charities, was created to mend the gap between the idea of health and wellness incorporated into one’s stress management routine. Any questions or concerns should be directed to Haley Rosano, California State University, Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA.
ABSTRACT

Catholic Charities - Diocese of Monterey has implemented *Stress Management in the Kitchen* though the Family Support Services department of the Seaside office. *Stress Management in the Kitchen* was implemented to address the knowledge gap between nutrition and healthy living. The purpose of the workshop series was to give clients a fun and digestible way to increase their knowledge on how their health and nutritional habits can or should be applied to how they deal with stress. These workshops were implemented through presentation and a series of activities. The measurement of these workshops will be obtained through an exit survey from participants. These results were analyzed by the Family Support Services team to see how to better serve future populations. Next steps for Catholic Charities is to revise the current workshop and analyze how improvements can be made to increase the knowledge in participants.

*Keywords*: Nutrition, Education, Stress, Management, Workshop
AGENCY AND COMMUNITY SERVED

Catholic Charities- Diocese of Monterey, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing human services to the poor and underserved while focusing on social justice, peace, human dignity, self-determination and self-sufficiency. While Catholic Charities has many offices within the Monterey Peninsula, the Seaside office is the only one with majority of services in one office. Some of the services provided to the community are: immigration and citizenship services, family support services and tattoo removal. To expand on family support services, the following are offered: assistance with CalFresh applications and processes, assistance with Medi-Cal application and process, emergency rent and utility assistance (Hope in Home), family and finance coaching (Pathways to Stability) and Nutrition Education Obesity Prevention Program.

The community served at Catholic Charities is made up of the poor and disadvantaged within the Monterey Peninsula. Catholic Charities believes in providing those in need with the tools and resources to build and sustain a happy healthy lifestyle. In addition, Catholic Charities also serves it’s volunteers and interns with resources and developmental growth within their programs. Volunteers and interns have the opportunity to assist in the serving of the people in need around them, while gaining experience.
PROBLEM ISSUE/NEED

Clients of the Nutrition Education Obesity Prevention Program (NEOPP) are apart of a five session, one hour (five hours total) course that teaches them about how to improve their eating habits, increase water intake and ensure their families are getting proper nutrition. This is in place due to the alarming percentage of Monterey County residents with serious health issues.

Some of the reasons why this is: residents have little education on health and nutrition and how it affects stress, no access to healthy food options and residents may be unaware how to manage stress through nutrition or even what stress management is. While NEOPP is provided to adults and children, it is outside of school and working hours, meaning more of the community may not be able to attend. Looking further, Monterey County has pockets known as “food deserts” making healthy and nutritious foods un-accessible to families. In Castroville alone, 56% of a family’s income is spent on groceries and transportation to those stores (Monterey County Health Department, 2010). Lastly, looking through the Monterey County Health Department’s resources, there is nothing about access to stress workshops, how to relieve stress or how to teach children about it.
Consequences from this issue are big. The Monterey County Health Department found that the top leading cause for early death (under 75 years old) is heart disease (2013). Heart disease is caused by various factors but specifically, unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise, and obesity (Center for Disease Control, 2017).

Lastly, higher healthcare costs is a large consequence on the affected population as with more health issues comes higher/more medical bills. For example, $15,000 is the average cost for a hospital to treat a heart attack alone - not including if they find heart disease or other issues including further treatment and hospitalization (American Heart Association, 2017).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TITLE: Stress Management in the Kitchen

Stress Management in the Kitchen was a series of educational workshops designed with activities to inform it’s audience about the importance of living a healthy and active lifestyle. The idea behind this project was to inform participants that aspects of their everyday life can contribute to stress. This project was designed with the intent to give participants the knowledge and self awareness of how their everyday lifestyles have a drastic impact on their overall health and wellbeing. At the end of these workshops, participants developed a short term plan to improve their eating habits and level of physical activity to reduce everyday stress. By incorporating the information and easy diagrams about “My Plate” (USDA, 2018) from the NEOPP, participants had a systematic plan in place for when they left the workshop. By having a plan as to how they incorporate nutrition and physical activity into their stress management, participants are taking an initiative towards their own recovery/well being.
Living a healthy lifestyle through nutrition and exercise promotes lower stress levels (Harvard Medical School, 2011). *Stress Management in the Kitchen* was designed to break down the logistics and research as to why participants should focus on their health and wellness, while implementing ideas and resources from NEOPP. These workshops gave a breakdown of short term and long term side effects of high level stress, quick and easy ways to bring nutrition and wellness into day to day life, and activities to create a plan of action for after the session.

Through continuous research on stress management, one of the top factors to help reduce stress is eating a balanced diet and incorporating physical activity. According to Matthew Stults-Kolehmainen and Rajita Sinha, physical activity assists with momentary stressful situations, but in the long run helps ease depression (Yale School of Medicine, 2014).

**PROJECT JUSTIFICATION**

According to the American Psychological Association, children between the ages of eight and seventeen are showing symptoms of high level stress (Munsey, 2010). Unfortunately, parents are not catching on. Within the same study, it was shown that only 13% of parents are aware of these symptoms. This demonstrates parents are unaware of what is stressing their children out and how to prevent such high levels. While this can correlate into the parents stress levels, it is important for them to know how to manage these issues at home through a nutritious and active lifestyle.

Among adults in Seaside, the current obesity rate is 26% (Monterey County Health Department, 2013) and among children in or under 7th grade is 48% (California Department of Education, 2015). Monterey County as a whole has a 22.3% obesity rate – that is one of the
highest in the country (Monterey County Health Department, 2013). By incorporating NEOPP into these workshops, Catholic Charities has the necessary resources to inform their clients about stress management. Participants have the opportunity to be involved in their own progression of making healthier eating and drinking habits as well as increasing their physical activity.

While NEOPPP does provide a five session, one hour course for participants of either of their age cohorts to participate in, there is no mention of how a healthy lifestyle can lower stress. Stress Management in the Kitchen mends this gap and opens new doors to it’s participants.

There are two subprograms within NEOPP – one for adults “Wise Voices, Smart Choices”, and one for youth “Young Voices, Smart Choices”. The program for adults focuses on how to transition into a healthier diet, how to incorporate more water into their lives, and how to teach their children/family/ etc. how to also eat better in order to carry out healthy, long lives. The program for children is designed to plant the ways of healthy eating into their habits now, rather than later. By teaching youth about how to eat proper nutritious foods, it is also likely that they will share their knowledge with their families, friends and continue to follow the lifestyle (Catholic Charities- Diocese of Monterey, 2016). In Monterey County, according to the California Department of Education (2015), 48% of children under 7th grade are considered obese. With NEOPP being implemented in schools, as well as youth attending the community garden, there is potential to lower these rates, and make Seaside a happy, healthy community.

The community of Seaside is now able to enjoy the process and results of a community garden, “Seeds of Hope”, through NEOPP at Catholic Charities. While this program strives to see its participants make long-term changes, it is designed to teach participants small changes they can make in their lives to achieve healthy, happy lifestyles. “Seeds of Hope” was given as
an additional resource for participants. At “Seeds of Hope”, there is a volunteer based set of “garden hours” where volunteers can come and help maintain the garden. Through NEOPP there are also a series of classes available to the community that take place at the garden.

The community garden, “Seeds of Hope”, intends to provide community members with opportunity for stress management resources within Catholic Charities. The idea for having a workshop designed specifically for the community was to target working people who live in an area that is considered a food desert. The American Nutrition Association describes a food desert as a place with little to no access to fresh fruits, vegetables and meats due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers markets and health food stores (Gallagher, 2011). Food deserts can cause food insecurity which is personally not being able to access food outside of the food desert due to issues such as transportation (Feeding America, 2017). While these are prevalent issues in Seaside, “Seeds of Hope” is designed to provide low income families with the opportunity to learn more about their nutritional needs, how they can be apart of the change for their families and other resources within Catholic Charities. Stress Management in the Kitchen brings these connections together to give more resources to those in need.

PROJECT RESULTS

Through a series of educational workshops, Stress Management in the Kitchen was delivered to increase the participants knowledge on nutrition education and how it related to their stress management. This outcome was assessed through having participants actively participate in the workshop and provide their current knowledge with the group. At the end of the workshop, participants were given a “Self Care Plan” to implement a few of the things they had learned in
the workshop to their everyday lives. This plan is designed to help participants refer back to it and use the strategies to reduce their stress levels - being that this was about nutrition, most participants decided to incorporate methods around their diet and exercise.

Methodology of assessment was a one page survey inquiring about the information gained through the workshop. The survey was intended to collect data on the following: how useful did they find this workshop, how likely they are they to use their self care plan and what programs would they like to know more about from Catholic Charities.

After completing the series of workshops, the final number of participants came out to 41. When looking at the results of this project, it showed that 95.12% of participants ranked this series of workshops as an eight or higher on a likert scale, asking if they found this useful. When assessing if participants wanted to learn more about agency specific programs, 63.41% stated they wanted to know more about the “Seeds of Hope” Community Garden, 31.71% said they wanted to know more about NEOPP and 29.27% stated they wanted to know more about CalFresh.

This project was hard to flush out. There were a lot of aspects that took some reaching to put together and that caused a bit of confusion within the workshop itself. However, when looking back at this workshop, some strengths found were: the volume and tone of voice used kept participants engaged, having multiple instances for audience participation seemed to create a higher retention of knowledge as the workshop progressed and having a large activity at the end, gave participants the opportunity to ask further questions as well as share with the room some of their ideas and new techniques.
As stated above, this was not the easiest project to conduct. Some of the limitations included: the length of the workshop being cut down to thirty minutes instead of one hour, not knowing exactly who the audience would be, finding specific research on stress management and nutrition, and lastly, trying to incorporate the community garden as a large aspect of the workshop. Smoothing out these kinks took time, and not everything was perfect. By having to cut the time of the workshop, a lot of vital information had to be removed and that made it hard to tie all of the information together, leaving gaps in the presentation. A lot of the research for this workshop was a binding of the separate categories, for example, taking research from a stress management article and piecing it with a nutrition journal. When it came to ensuring the community garden was incorporated, it became more of a resource for participants. The segment about the community garden was longer than some of the other segments, to ensure the participants knew this was a key point, and a major resource.

CONCLUSION

After delivering this workshop, it was noted that it should be at least one hour as thirty minutes was just not enough. A couple staff members of Catholic Charities attended the workshop on the second day, and were intrigued as to how they could make it apart of the NEOPP courses within the Community Garden. If the agency chose to progress with this workshop, it would need to be tailored to the specific population chosen as there are different statistics and methods for each age group and demographic. That was one of the best parts of this workshop, was that it was moldable to any group that was participating.
Should Family Support Services implement this workshop while in the “Seeds of Hope” community garden, there is opportunity to really dive deeper into the importance of physical activity and how participating in the garden will assist with that. There are also the aspects of, the stress relief that comes with gardening, as well as the nutritional value of the things growing in the garden.

This project should be continued as many participants were unaware how their stress levels affected their health, and how their health and eating habits affected their stress! Should it be continued the information itself needs to be more flushed out. Due to the time constraints on the initial project, it seemed as if there were a lot of informational gaps and a lot more room for activities to help participants gain a better understanding of the correlation.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

I learned so much from this project - mainly that I should practice what I preach. Following that idea, I never knew the different ways food and nutrition affected your brain and stress levels. I was happy to find that I am on the right path with my carbohydrate intake as it releases serotonin (most important piece of information delivered, in my opinion).

There was a lot of professional growth throughout my capstone process. Adaptability was one of the main skills I enhanced through this journey. Despite having to move agencies at the end of my first semester of Capstone, once I was settled at Catholic Charities my project was still switching around until this final semester. While this was challenging, starting and stopping projects - I gained a generous amount of new skills. My statistical abilities were immensely
enhanced, professional communication skills increased, and most importantly my knowledge of public administration and non-profit management has grown considerably.

The skills above were what guided me to the execution of my project. I wanted something concise, data driven and engaging. I tried to tie my knowledge of programs provided at Catholic Charities, to things college students are interested in. This is how I formulated the idea to combine NEOPP’s teachings about nutrition and the concept that college students are always stressed out. While the ideas seemed far fetched, participants were quite surprised to find a significant correlation to what they ate and how it affected their stress levels.

This project addressed need of the agency in two ways: first, grabbing the attention of a younger audience to bring in a new generation of donors, and providing community engagement to expand participants knowledge of what non-profit organizations hold for the public. While both of these ‘needs’ would be categorized in the ‘Public Administration’ side of the house, it also feeds into the Family Support Service side as well. College students are always looking for ways to make their lives easier and less stressful- by being exposed to things like MediCal and CalFresh assistance, that could take some financial burden off of some students. Students have access to get volunteer hours/experience, food they grew themselves, further courses about nutrition and lastly, time in the garden to be surrounded by the beauty of the community and nature!

In the broader scheme of things, this project addressed obesity. One of the first points I mention are the national and county rate of obesity. Another point made later in my workshop is that when you do not take care of your nutrition, you stress about your health. It was interesting to see participants puzzled yet enlightened facial expressions when they made this connection.
To further this topic beyond my project, there needs to be more research on stress management and nutrition. There also needs to be more workshops for longer periods of time because there is so much information depending on what demographic you are targeting. These workshops need to be done in the places with the highest stress levels such as: staff meetings at schools, corporations, nonprofits and universities. The goal is to inform the public how they can live happier and healthier lifestyles through the management of everyday activities.
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### APPENDICES

Project Timeline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Deliverables</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Completion Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting to make a timeline for garden</td>
<td>Plan in place to execute garden</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>September 10, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go out into the field to find materials for garden</td>
<td>Receive donations, discounted materials, find useful things</td>
<td>Early September - End of September 2018</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First planter build</td>
<td>Have something to put in the garden</td>
<td>September 10th - September 19th 2018</td>
<td>September 20, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build Pilot Garden</td>
<td>Have something to show the community</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>September 20, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create workshop around stress management tied to food and nutrition</td>
<td>Inform communities on the correlation between stress and nutrition</td>
<td>August - October 2018</td>
<td>October 29, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Garden to Public</td>
<td>Create a community of people willing to help take care of garden</td>
<td>Early Sept - Dec 2018</td>
<td>November 10, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give workshop</td>
<td>See change within the community about stress</td>
<td>November 2018</td>
<td>November 13 &amp; 14, 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Used for Participants:

**THANK YOU FOR COMING!**

Please fill out this quick questionnaire so we can continue providing you quality content that YOU care about!

**Where did you find out about this workshop?**

______________________________

**On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest, 10 the highest) how useful did you find this workshop? (Circle one)**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**What is one thing we could have expanded on to better your knowledge of nutrition education and its effects on stress?**

______________________________

**Now that you have your stress management plan, on a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest, 10 the highest) how likely are you to implement this in your everyday life? (Circle one)**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**After this workshop, which of the following programs would you like to know more about? (circle all that apply)**

CalFresh  NEOP  “Seeds of Hope” Community Garden

Anything we missed? Let us know!