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Developing information on mental health and counseling services at TFCFL

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### **Abstract**

Taylor Farms Center for Learning (TFCFL) is an afterschool program, which is located in East Salinas, serving primarily 76% of Hispanic and Latino children and families. Providing various programs to break down barriers for children to experience success. Every year in the United States, up to 20% of children and youth experience a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder but nearly half of all children receive no mental health services. Due to this few agency-sponsored services address this health issue and TFCFL wants to make sure they are offering the right kind of services for their community. This research project will be documenting information on mental health and counseling services at TFCFL. Implemented through a staff and volunteer questionnaire, which will gather data on their knowledge about mental health. The purpose for this project is to gather information on this particular problem. The expected outcome of this research project is to have a better understanding on the staff's knowledge on addressing any encounter with these this health issues.

*Keywords: mental health, developing, counseling, data, children*

### **Agency Information**

Future Citizens Foundation is a national non-profit organization. It is made up of three different programs, starting with The First Tee that gives young people of all backgrounds an opportunity to develop, through golf and character education, life-enhancing values such as honesty, integrity and sportsmanship. The Pay It Forward Scholarship and Mentoring Program that provides a four-year scholarship at California State University, Monterey Bay, to local Monterey County students who are first-generation college student. Opening it's doors in 2016, Taylor Farms Center for Learning was established, and after school program located in the most distressed neighborhood of East Salinas, serving primarily 76% of Hispanic and Latino children and families. Starting from early elementary school to college providing guidance and services along the way. The TFCFL aims to keep vulnerable youth safe by providing supervised, healthy activities in after-school programs. TFCFL's efforts to strengthen their youth's resilience and resistance to the influence of gangs and violence, positively contributes to their health and well-being. This is done through various local community partners and donors around the county such as, Tanimura & Antle, Dole, RC Farms, Anthony Costa & Sons, and of course Taylor Farms.

TFCFL mission "is to offer young people of Monterey County opportunities for a better future. We do this through active involvement in life skills and golf skills that are learned at our campus, in the classroom and in service and mentorship to each other and the community" (FCF, 2018). It provides a number of services for youth from the surrounding community; helping each define success on their own terms. The Center focuses in three primary areas: Academia, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) courses, and LEAP (Life Exploration and Preparation). With these programs in place, TFCFL's goal is to break down

barriers, enable children to experience success, and support them in planning for a productive future.

### **Problem Description**

TFCFL is a non-profit that is continuing to grow and increasing their resources to provide more efficient services for their participants. Every year in the United States, up to 20% of children and youth experience a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015; Perou et al., 2013). However, nearly half of all children with emotional or behavioral difficulties receive no mental health services (Simon, Pastor, Reuben, Huang, & Goldstrom, 2015). Only 7.4% of young people report any mental health visits in the past year (Merikangas et al., 2010). The health problem this project is addressing is mental health problems in children and youth that are not addressed early in life can inflict a high cost on young people themselves as well as their families and society (Perou et al., 2013).

The consequences of mental health problems can be painful and can include serious difficulties at home, with peers, and in school; a higher risk for dropping out; and increased risk of engaging in substance use, criminal behavior, and other risk-taking behaviors (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014; Vos et al., 2012). But the financial cost is also high. Mental health hospitalizations for teens cost \$2.6 billion in 2012. The total annual cost for care associated with mental disorders for persons under age 24 is estimated to be \$247 billion annually. This estimate includes costs related to health care, special education, juvenile justice, and decreased productivity (Perou et al., 2013)

Affordable mental health and counseling services in low-income communities are too low. According to Community Health Needs Assessment Report (2016), it concluded that mental

health was ranked the fourth leading community health need on the list. Indicating that the community TFCFL works with is lacking to provide this type of service.

Youth living in low-income communities have increased risk for mental health problems. According to a recent study, “despite the mental health needs of families living in poverty, few gain access to high-quality mental health services. There is a growing urgency to develop models of mental health care that are tailored to the needs of these vulnerable children and their families” (Hodgkinson, Godoy, Beers, & Lewin, 2017). A few agency-sponsored services address this health issue in Salinas’s community. TFCFL wants to make sure their funding is supporting and going towards the needed services. This is caused by lack of individual staff member’s awareness, lack of research done on specific health issue, and inadequate outreach resources in the agency. The consequences to this problem affect the agency by providing adequate assistance to the participants they are serving with proper trained staff members, increasing disruptions in program/activity planning, and underserving low-income and at-risk youth in their community.

Alternative ways to address these problems would be to inform staff and parents on additional resources and services in the community that are directly working with this issue. Educating and building up resilience within the agency can also be another way overcome this issue.

### **Project Description and Implementation**

This research project gathered information on mental health and counseling services at TFCFL through data collection. The expected outcome of the research project is to develop information on TFCFL staff’s awareness and knowledge to evaluate the possible presence of

needed training and extra support. Few agency-sponsored services address this health issue and TFCFL wants to make sure they are offering the right services for their community. According to an article by Hodgkinson, Godoy, Beers, and Amy (2017), “Living in a poor or low-income household has been linked to poor health and increased risk for mental health problems in both children and adults that can persist across the life span.” The agency will then be able to address this issue with more knowledge once they recognize what their staff already knows.

The project implementation plan was composed of two parts. First, a single questionnaire was developed for the staff and volunteers about their knowledge, training, resource information, and participant experiences with mental health and counseling (see appendix C). Second, off-site research was conducted through literature reviews, academic journals, and Internet research. The research was used to understand the advantages and disadvantages of providing youth with mental health and counseling services, how common this health issue was, and the risks of it not being treated early. Finally, the final data was compiled and analyzed that identified final results that was used to make proper recommendations to the agency based of the findings.

The individuals who participate in this research project included the staff members of not only Taylor Farms Center for Learning but the First Tee as well and volunteers. The questionnaire was conducted during their breaks to allow enough time and provide any extra assistance. Making sure to provide simple and direct questions that gathered enough data that helped identify staff’s awareness on this issue. The mentor then reviewed and approved all materials developed for the project before moving forward. The resources that where used to implement this project included the participation of staff and volunteers, tablets provided by TFCFL for participants to take the questionnaire, appropriate time for staff and volunteers to

individual take the questionnaire, and internet access to be able to do further research. Full scope of work can be found on (appendix A).

The goal of this project was to identify information on training needs and their staff's knowledge on mental health and counseling issues. The agency wants to make sure that their staff has the proper knowledge on certain health issues to better run their activities and support the participants when they seek or need extra assistance. By implementing this project, TFCFL wants to make sure they are excelling in meeting their mission and not only providing the right services for their participants but supporting their staff as well. This includes providing services that go beyond academics and life skills to include other needed resources/services that acknowledge and address how to handle behavioral and mental health issues with participants, which will allow them to know how to handle personal life stressors they might be going through.

This project will collect information on mental health and counseling services for TFCFL to identify how to better assist their staff. For the past year TFCFL has been trying to expand their services in other areas of interest. Making cuts and accommodations to their services to make sure that they are providing the most affective opportunities for the participants attending. According to Healthy Future (2018), “ there now is a general understanding that mental health issues and illnesses have their roots in childhood, during critical periods of growth, particularly in adolescence, when physical and psychological changes add to the chemistry of ongoing brain development.” Since mental health issues is so new to our society many individuals don't have the knowledge of the behaviors or know how to reach out for help until it's to late. Also, lacking effective agencies that are offering these services for free or at discount prices. TFCFL wants to make sure they are aware of this health problem and if it needs to be further addressed at the



agency by providing staff with the right support. Conducting the research project provided several benefits to TFCFL. By developing information on mental health and counseling services it will indicate what strategic goals TFCFL should focus and move towards to better support participants and staff. Additionally, having more information about this problem will help narrow down services they should or want to provide in the future. The project provided an advantage on identifying a potential problem early on. This project had a positive impact by creating information for TFCFL to better understand and serve their participants and community they are working with.

A challenge faced during the research project was acquiring enough responses from the questionnaire, which was a problem since TFCFL didn't have a huge amount of staff. Another challenge was finding enough research to provide evidence to support the health problem and population the project was trying to address and keeping the data and research specific and concise. During the last few weeks of the semester a strict schedule was placed to stay on track to finish the project. Making sure that the days spent at the agency was productive to complete the project with sufficient time, while doing my daily intern activities/assignments. These challenges shifted gears in the direction the project was going and had a bit of an impact in the final results.

### **Assessment Plan**

The expected outcome for this project was to gather sufficient information on mental health and counseling from TFCFL staff and volunteers to be able to address this issue more sufficiently. That brought awareness of a possible presence of mental health issues that haven't

been recognized yet. This included acknowledging information that assessed services for social/behavioral issues as well.

The assessment plan for this project was done by conducting interviews with key personnel to assess the project's impact on agency's ability to better serve the community. This included the director and two program coordinators. The individuals interviewed know the mission/values of the agency and the goals they are trying to meet internally. They know the population and community they are trying to advocate for. They were able to determine the project's value and identify what the next steps need to be done to address the problem now that the agency has identified the issues. There is no better feedback then from individuals who are most passionate about the work they are doing internally to see change in their community.

In, addition if the agency accepts the research and final results as a way to decide to further continue the project and start assessing the need of mental health and counseling services by the information that was gathered, which will measure if the project was a success. The project assessment was done by asking five questions in the interview, which are listed below.

- After reading the findings, is TFCFL mission addressing this issue?
- Do you think this service is in high demand?
- Financially would this agency be able to support this service?
- How can you better support your staff now that you know they lack training on this issue?
- More then half your staff has an encounter with a participant dealing with a mental health issues, do you think this should have been reported?

### **Findings and Results of Assessment Process**

From the questionnaire finding and interview assessment results the project was able to achieve the expected outcomes on developing information on staff's awareness and knowledge

on mental health and counseling services. The questionnaire got 16 responses out a sample size of 22 staff members. It showed that only 35% of those could identify mental health behaviors or symptoms and they identified them as autism, ADHD, bipolar, and depression but 80% couldn't name one agency around the community that offers these services. The questionnaire also showed that 78% have observed or heard participants express their emotional, behavioral, or social health issues and over half of them have had participants approach them with concerns/questions. Although 60% of staff answered yes when asked if there are participants in the agency that are dealing with mental health issues only 20% of those staff members have received proper training.

The evidence from the questionnaire showed that TFCFL needs improvement in staff training; since more then have agreed to be interested in some type that could teach them how to address this issue, organize strategic goals for staff and participants in the organization, and how they can excel/improve to better support their staff. One of the strengths from the project's method was the ability to question staff from all three programs, since all of them have the same amount of interaction with the participants the organization works with. In addition, one of the challenges from the project's method was identifying who to interview to evaluate the final results, which was best addressed by getting at least one person from each department.

### **Recommendations**

After reviewing the results from the questionnaire it was clear to see that TFCFL staff had little knowledge and lack adequate training to deal with participants dealing with these health issues but have a significant about of interaction with participants dealing and wanting help with certain issues. My recommendation's for the agency after concluding this project is to require at least one training seminar about mental health for all staff members in each

department. Specifically regarding topics about depression, bullying, learning disabilities, and ADHD. Second, bring in professional counselor to run the training properly to be able to role-play scenarios. Third, require monthly check-in with staff on any participant encounters. Since most interactions with staff went undocumented or discussed with supervisor according to the survey.

The project was able to identify a health issue on children dealing with mental health problems and how they have increased over the years in low-income communities. As a result of adults being unaware and lacking knowledge of symptoms and behaviors in the agency were parents trust their kids safety and expect well rounded individuals to be around their children. The project showed that the agency needed to better understand the services their community offers other than their own to better serve as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

From this year-long research and report writing process the most important insight I've gained was that things would never go the way you think. This whole process taught me to be patient and understanding when changes and accommodations needed to be done on my project because certain ways didn't work out or flow anymore. I was able to see myself academically grow from the beginning when designing this project to being able to problem solving and creating a collaborative project that not just addressed staff at my agency but the foundation as a whole. Being able to build motivation during times my project felt like it wasn't moving in the right direction.

The biggest lesson learned from this whole experience was being able to learn how to be assertive on the direction I wanted my project to go towards even when people didn't agree. I was able push out of my comfort zone and confidently present my evidence on why I choose this

project and the issues it was addressing. The biggest thing I will remember from this project ten years from now would be that the smallest contribution could have a big effect in an agency.

There were times where I felt that my project wasn't having a huge effect to the community but after being done with it and going over my findings with my mentor I realized that even though it wasn't effecting the community head on it was effecting my agency internally to better serve the community.

My advice for future CHHS student interns on what to expect and how to approach their senior year field placement and capstone project is to be assertive when it comes to making a name for yourself at their internship site. It's important to learn from all departments and positions at your agency because you never know where that might lead your interest for future career paths. Always remembering to do it with respect and permission when addressing other interest to your mentor. Even when not place at your first choice it's important to give it your all once you assigned to one because each agency can open other doors that lead to bigger and better opportunities.

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**Appendix A**

<b>Scope of Work</b>		
<b>Objective:</b> Developing information for mental health and counseling services		
<b>Project description:</b> The purpose of this research project is to identify information about the possible presence of mental health and counseling at TFCFL. This will indicate if further assessment is needed. One questionnaire will be developed and used to research the knowledge of staff and volunteers about mental health and counseling resources and behaviors. Further, research will be conducted to identify the advantages and disadvantages of mental health and counseling services.		
<b>Goal:</b> The goal for Taylor Farms Center for Learning is to gather enough information on a potential problem to determine if there is reason to further assess mental health and counseling services at their site.		
<b>Primary objective of the project:</b> To better provide the agency with information about the problem for mental health and counseling services to determine if resources should be directed to this area through an assessment process.		
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline/deadlines</b>
Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor	Final capstone project idea approved	Oct 5, 2018
Identify what staff and volunteers will be apart of the project	Submit draft list of potential participants to mentor for review and approval.	Oct- Nov 2018
Develop one questionnaire for staff and volunteers on their knowledge on mental health and counseling services.	Submit draft staff and volunteer questionnaire to mentor for review and approval.	Jan-Feb 2019
	Final approved questionnaire	Jan-Feb 2019
Distribute questionnaires to staff and volunteers within a couple weeks.	Submit draft distribution dates to mentor for review and approval	Feb-Mar 2019
Interviews with key personnel about data being collected.	Submit draft interview responses to mentor for review and approval	Mar-Apr 2019
Research advantages and disadvantages on having youth mental health and counseling services	Submit draft research finding to mentor for final review and approval	On- going
Compile and analyze data; complete draft report on findings and plan	Findings report completed/submitted to mentor for approval	April, 2019
Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 3, 2019
Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading (posters submitted)	May 8-10, 2018
Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final presentation at Capstone Festival!!	May 15 or 16, 2019 (TBD)



**Appendix B**

<b>Project Title:</b> Developing information on mental health and counseling services at TFCFL		
<b>Problem Statement:</b> Affordable mental health and counseling services in low-income communities are too low.		
<b>CAUSES TO AGENCY PROBLEM</b>	<b>AGENCY-SPECIFIC “MICRO-LEVEL” PROBLEM ADDRESSED BY PROJECT</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES TO AGENCY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of official training</li> <li>• Lack of adequate resources/outreach</li> <li>• Not enough staffing</li> <li>• Inadequate structure/scheduling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few agency-sponsored services addressing health issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agency mission not being met</li> <li>• Reduction in participants attending</li> <li>• Underserving low-income at-risk youth</li> </ul>
<b>CAUSES TO BROADER HEALTH PROBLEM</b>	<b>BROADER “MACRO-LEVEL” HEALTH/SOCIAL PROBLEM</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES TO SOCIETY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low level of social support</li> <li>• Lack of information given to individuals</li> <li>• Lack of insurance or type of “carve out</li> <li>• Lack of clinic hours flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living in low-income communities has increased risk for mental health problems in children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher risk for behavioral outburst</li> <li>• Lower life expectancy</li> <li>• Higher rates of children dropping out of school</li> </ul>

### Appendix C

#### Staff/Personal/Volunteers

Questions:

1. Do you feel a need for mental health and counseling services?
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
2. Would it be beneficial to provide this extra service?
  - Yes
  - No
3. Have any participants approached you with mental health or counseling concerns/questions?
  - Yes
  - NO
    - If yes, how was it addressed?
4. Can you name 1-3 agencies around your community that offers free mental health and counseling services?
  - Yes
  - No
    - If so please list them below?
5. Can you identify mental health behaviors or symptoms?
  - Yes
  - No
6. Have you ever received training on mental health and counseling?
  - Yes
  - No
    - If no, would you be interested in receiving training about this topic?
7. Are there participants in the agency who you feel are dealing with mental health disorders?
  - Yes
  - No
8. Have you observed or heard any participants express problems dealing with their emotional health, behavioral health, social health, etc.?
  - Yes
  - No
9. Are you comfortable identifying these services?
  - Yes
  - No
10. Have any parents approached or asked for these services?
  - Yes
  - No