

5-2020

Wellness Group for Stress Management and Mental Health Awareness

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Hancock, Brittany A., "Wellness Group for Stress Management and Mental Health Awareness" (2020).
Capstone Projects and Master's Theses. 732.
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Running head: WELLNESS GROUP

Wellness Group for Stress Management and Mental Health Awareness

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Abstract

Learning for Life Charter School is a public charter school that works with students who are considered at risk for dropping out of school before completing their high school diploma. Students at Learning for Life Charter School lack *coping skills* in an academic setting and thus get into physical and verbal fights as well as not completing their assignments. These behaviors can be caused by a lack of support from teachers and staff, personal trauma and family dysfunction. An educational intervention on campus was created and implemented which was called a *wellness group*. This intervention worked to increase knowledge of healthy coping skills, *stress management* and *mental health awareness*. Based on a focus group done with student participants and a pre and post knowledge survey, on average, students knew more about the above topics than they did at the beginning of the program. Recommendations that other schools can implement are creating an educational intervention that teaches students who are having behavioral issues at school about the importance of coping skills, managing stress and mental health.

Wellness Group for Stress Management and Mental Health Awareness

Learning for Life Charter School is a public charter school located in Marina, CA, which primarily serves students who are at risk for not completing their high school diploma. The school serves seventh through twelfth grade students from the Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Tri-County area. Learning for Life Charter School is a diverse community with about 80% of students being minorities and 79 % of students being from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Learning for Life Charter School, 2019).

Agency Description

The mission is, “Enabling students in grades 7-12 who had dropped out or were at risk for dropping out of traditional schools to become motivated again to learn, to develop a desire to complete their education, and to earn a high school diploma.” (Learning for Life Charter School, 2019, para.1). The vision of Learning for Life is to use a flexible learning environment and various services to meet students where they are at and get them caught up academically so they can graduate or they can matriculate back into traditional schooling (Learning for Life Charter School, 2019). Essentially, their goal is to increase the graduation rate in the tri-county area. In 2016, 85.4 % of students graduated with a high school diploma in Monterey County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). This means that a significant amount of students in Monterey County are not graduating high school, which is an obstacle for future endeavors.

Learning for Life Charter School offers services such as access to faculty and staff on weekdays from 8am to 5pm (Learning for Life Charter School, 2019). Faculty and staff include teachers for various subjects, a principal, an academic counselor, an on-site psychologist, an onsite social worker, an on-site special education representative, multiple subject tutors, an

administrative front desk staff member, tech support, as well as some California State University Monterey Bay service learning interns. The school provides an online learning environment while also having a main campus drop-in center where there is access to food and drink, tech support, computers, some on-site classes, college preparation activities and various seminars. Students are required to come in weekly to meet with their teachers for supervision and they are all issued an android tablet to complete assignments on.

Project Description and Justification

Jen, another intern, and I collaborated to implement an educational intervention at the charter school in the form of a weekly wellness group. We met weekly as a group that focuses on teaching students healthy coping mechanisms, stress management and mental health awareness through various activities such as sharing personal reflections, workshops, physical activities and more.

The intervention was mostly implemented through communication, fundraising and planning. The wellness group was advertised through flyers and connecting with students and staff to popularize the group and increase attendance. Students were reminded to come to each meeting and were communicated with as to what we would be doing the following week, as well as what time and where the meetings would be held. The group required funding or resources to get supplies for the various activities, food, and drinks for students during our meetings. Guest speakers were invited to meetings to keep students interested and the group required regular planning. Lastly, in order for the group to be successfully and professionally done, attendance was taken, data from surveys and interviews were collected, copies were made of receipts, donations and various other documents.

The primary purpose and goal of this wellness group was to make students more aware of their emotional triggers that cause them stress and how they can combat those feelings through various activities. The group did this through various activities such as sharing their self reflections, learning coping skills in workshops, using physical activity as a tool for managing stress and using hobbies such as art or gardening to cope with stress. Ideally, this would help the agency by providing guidance to students on dealing with their emotions thus they will be less likely to act out at school, get into fights and avoid doing their homework assignments due to stress. The primary problem we wanted to address was that many students at Learning for Life Charter School do not have healthy coping mechanisms to help them manage their stress and so they act out at school and possibly at home.

There are behavioral issues many students at the school are affected by. Students get into verbal and physical fights, as well as not completing their homework. From talking to students and staff about this project, a few major causes of students lacking coping skills necessary to function at school are having a dysfunctional family home, personal traumas and a lack of attention and support from school faculty. If this issue were not addressed at the school, there are possible consequences such as not having healthy coping skills such as getting in trouble with the law, not graduating high school, not being capable of holding a job and poverty. This wellness group provided an opportunity for students to address their stressors and learn to manage their responses to those stressors through healthy coping mechanisms such as healthy reflection, physical activities and education.

Students at Learning for Life have behavioral issues and this wellness group benefited individual students through teaching them coping mechanisms and stress management

techniques as well as giving them a safe place to explore how they are feeling. The goal of the group was that it will also benefit staff and the school by reducing the number of fights and incidences of students misbehaving by giving the students the skills necessary to vent their frustrations elsewhere rather than at school on other students or staff. It also benefits the community by helping students feel more confident expressing themselves so they can better contribute to their communities and be more likely to graduate from high school because of their self awareness.

The methods we used to implement this project are developing and delivering a curriculum to students, providing activities for students which help with stress management, recruiting students through flyers and communicating with students and staff to maximize attendance. Fundraising was done by contacting various stores such as Starbucks, Grocery Outlet and Michael's Craft Store to donate supplies needed for activities, food, beverages and gift cards to raffle at the end of each month. The intervention was assessed for success through a pre and post survey as well as individual interviews and feedback from students. Weekly attendance was tracked through a sign in sheet at the beginning of each session.

Implementation

My role was rooted in communication, fundraising and planning. It was necessary to advertise the workshop through flyers and connecting with students and staff to increase attendance. Regular reminders for students to come to each meeting and communicate what activities would be done the following week were given out. It was also necessary to find funding or resources to get supplies as well as to provide food and drinks for students during our meetings. It was necessary to plan activities and collect data. Lastly, it was also necessary to

keep track of any data from surveys and interviews, donations, receipts, attendance sheets and various other documents. The project was sponsored by Starbucks and Grocery Outlet. They donated gift cards to the school, the Starbucks gift cards were raffled at the end of the month for students who attended the group, and the grocery outlet gift card was used to provide food and to students who attended.

A conference room at the school was reserved every Tuesday for an hour for the rest of the semester so that we could have our wellness group there. On Tuesday and Friday, planning workshop activities, topics and food to bring that week took place. Lists of supplies needed to bring for the activity and how to fund those supplies also took place on those days.

Some potential challenges the project faced were making sure that we had enough students attending each group. There are not many students who come to the main campus, so it could have been a challenge to convince the students who do come in to participate since they are often busy doing homework or getting tutoring. Also, trying to get students who do not come to campus often and mostly work from home was a challenge. Getting the group out there and known to all students, even the students who don't come to campus was a challenge. It may have been possible to send out a group email to all students to inform them about the group. Keeping students who were showing up to sessions regularly interested and continuously engaged in learning was another challenge that came up.

This project required funding to complete. Again, the wellness group collaborated with Grocery Outlet to provide groceries to make meals for students and provide snacks and drinks for the group. Starbucks provided gift cards for us to do monthly raffles in exchange for attending the groups.

The main activities we did were planning and implementing activities for the wellness group. The group met nine times over the fall semester beginning Tuesday, October 15 and met weekly or every Tuesday. The group ran until December when students went on winter break. Activities that took place in the wellness group were stress management workshops, mental health awareness workshops and fun de-stressing activities such as art or hiking. Each week on Tuesdays before the meetings and Fridays we planned the next week's activities. We also planned out meals and on Friday's did grocery shopping for meals. At the beginning of each workshop we passed around a sign in sheet to keep track of attendance and to put names in our Starbucks gift card monthly raffle. Sign in sheets happened weekly and raffles monthly at the last group of the month.

On Monday before the Tuesday group, meals were prepared in advance and on Tuesday meals were reheated and set up for the event before noon when the group began. Also, on Tuesday before the meeting, on site handouts or activities necessary for that day's activities were printed. Set up was also done that day as well. During the event, photos were taken for the capstone and students in the photos had to have parental permission to have their pictures taken. Copies of everything done were needed, including activities and receipts for the schools records.

Scope of Work and Timeline

The title of this project was Wellness Group for Stress Management and Mental Health Awareness. The project description was that this wellness group would be a weekly group that focused on teaching students healthy coping mechanisms, stress management and mental health awareness through various activities such as sharing personal reflections, workshops, physical activity and more. The goal was to increase knowledge of coping skills, stress management and

mental health awareness. The primary objective of the project was to teach students more about the above topic than they did before and have less incidences of behavioral issues on campus. Activities included lectures, workshops, reflections and sharing thoughts, art therapy, physical therapy, surveys and incentive raffles. The deliverables were increased knowledge of self, learning healthy coping mechanisms, learning to lower stress levels, higher graduation rates, higher retention rates and lower incidences of behavioral issues.

On October 5, the pre knowledge survey was given, on October 15 we introduced the group, students introduced themselves to each other and the monthly attendance raffle was explained. On October 22, there was a hand art activity and art therapy lecture. On October 29, there was a physical activity lecture and jiu jitsu and self-defense activity. On November 5, there was a nature walk or hike and healthy eating demonstration. On November 12, there were benefits of gardening lecture and planting lettuce and radish seeds activity. On October 19, there was a team building lecture, airplane making activity and human knot activity. On December 10, there was a self reflection and sharing discussion, the post knowledge survey was given and there was a focus group to determine the effectiveness of the group. At the end of every month there was also a raffle for a starbucks gift card which happened on October 29, November 19 and December 10.

All activities from the scope of work were successfully conducted. Overall, the program ran smoothly. On a typical day, students were gathered in a conference room at 12pm on Tuesday, students helped themselves to food and drink and once they got settled the group would begin. The sign in sheet was passed around and signed and the group would start with either a quick lecture, introduction, educational video or powerpoint on the topic for that week. For

example, in the second week of the group students had a lecture and powerpoint on the mental health benefits of making art. During the last half hour of the group until 1pm, students do an activity based on practicing what they just learned. For example, during week 2 students did a hand art activity that we gave them instructions for during the powerpoint and it was therapeutic because students were able to later share what their hand art meant to them and describe it to their peers.

Assessment Plan

Many students at Learning for Life Charter School have behavioral issues such as getting into arguments with other students and staff, getting into physical fights, vandalism and other forms of bad behavior. The wellness group implemented at the school was created to address this issue by trying to address the underlying causes of these bad behaviors which is often poor stress management, lack of healthy coping skills and possibly issues of underlying mental health. The goal of this group was to expand Learning for Life Charter School students' knowledge of those topics and create an outlet for students to reflect on their unhealthy behaviors and replace those bad behaviors with subsequent healthy alternative behaviors.

Assessment of the effectiveness of the workshop was done through a pre and post knowledge survey as well as through a focus group that assessed how students felt about their wellness group experience and what information students believe they took from the group if any. The expected outcomes for the wellness group education intervention was for students to know more about the topics of mental health awareness, stress management and healthy coping skills than they did before starting the wellness group. Students were expected to not only know more about the topics but also to be able to implement the activities we did during the group to

better help them cope and deal with stress at school and in their lives. In turn, we expected students to behave better at school and get their assignments done on time.

Reflect on Your Learning

Through the implementation of this wellness group at Learning for Life Charter School, I have learned many things including some of the major learning outcomes for Collaborative Health and Human Services. I have learned collaboration and ethical leadership (California State University Monterey Bay [CSUMB], 2019). For example, during my capstone project this semester I have displayed this major learning outcome through working with other interns and staff to develop and implement a wellness group at my agency. Actually going out into my community to find donations for my group and collaborating with others at my agency was a very useful learning experience because it took me out of my comfort zone and made me feel like more of a part of my agency. I also believe this outcome helped me to gain confidence in my ability to work in the health and human services field.

I also implemented knowledge of health and human services (CSUMB, 2019). At my agency this semester, I've been able to learn more about how the agency, Learning for Life Charter School works and the systems in place at the school. I had to learn to implement my project within the regulations and standards of Learning for Life Charter School. I've also learned best practices for working with at-risk youth through workshops and talking to staff which directly benefited my wellness group by teaching me the best practices for working with the teens attending the group.

I have also implemented professional communication at my agency (CSUMB, 2019). I have had to navigate situations where communication was not happening effectively and I was

able to work through that in a professional manner and get what I needed to fulfill my role at the agency. Having a strict timeline with my capstone project, I had to express what I needed from my agency effectively to get tasks done on time and done well. This has helped me to have better communication with staff at Learning for Life Charter School.

Findings/Results

The methods used to collect data and measure the outcome of the wellness group was a pre and post knowledge survey as well as a focus group for students to participate in. For the pre and post knowledge survey, the average score for the pre test given to six students was 8.3 out of 16 or 51 percent. The same survey was given to eight students as a post knowledge survey and the average went up to 10.7 out of 16 or 67 percent. Students were asked to respond to five questions statements with answers ranging from four or strongly agree to one or strongly disagree. The higher the students' scores, the more confident they felt about their ability to combat stress and cope with difficult situations. The students' knowledge or confidence levels did increase by the end of the wellness group on average so the group was successful. The focus group was to determine if the students enjoyed the group and to let students share what they feel they took from the group. Overall this was a success as well because students gave generally good feedback and they believed that going to the group helped them create connections with other students which in turn helped them cope throughout the semester. This was something that was not expected but was achieved through the wellness group anyway.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the results of implementing an educational wellness group was positive since the pre and post knowledge surveys showed an increase in awareness on the topics of

mental health, coping skills and stress management by the end of group sessions. However, there was a limited sample size of about 10 students so further research should be done in order to conclude that this would be effective with a larger sample size or in differing environments. Although, research such as a 2015 study done by the Springer Science and Business Media, does show that teaching students mindfulness techniques and coping skills in alternative school settings is effective for personal transformation of adolescents (Wisner, Starzec). Based on this information, as well as the results of the wellness group surveys and feedback from Learning for Life Charter School staff, this program would likely prosper if continued. It was important to also research what the best communication strategies are for working with middle and high school aged students. Some reflections questions can help students learn more about themselves and how they manage stress or what coping mechanisms they use. Providing some ideas for healthy coping mechanisms and giving examples of some not so healthy coping methods and giving students a comparison were not only helpful but also necessary. Lastly, researching what hands on activities were best for overall wellness and mental clarity so that students can start looking into those as regular hobbies and introducing those activities in the group were helpful. Based on the findings of the wellness group surveys and focus group, I would recommend that the school continue to implement the wellness group program and continue to create more activities for students to do in order to keep students engaged in the program.

Personal Reflection/Final Thoughts

From my time as an intern at Learning for Life Charter School, I noticed that there were repeated behavioral issues at the school that could be representative of deeper issues within students. After doing some research and reading some scholarly articles included in this paper, I

learned that students can be affected by their home life so much so that they act out in academic settings. This can be due to stress at home and a lack of coping skills that were not taught at home. This is the reason I decided to create and implement a wellness group at the school that focused on coping skills, mental health awareness and stress management. I learned that I could do an educational intervention for students through doing fun activities and teaching students the benefits of doing those activities on their mental health. After completing the workshop and having students do a focus group as well as a pre and post knowledge before and after the group, based on the results of these tests, the students actually knew more about what to do when they are experiencing stress and how to cope better in school. Based on feedback from the students in the focus group as well as in conversation outside the wellness group, I ultimately learned that the students enjoyed the wellness group and that they felt more of a sense of community at their school due to giving the students an outlet to communicate with each other on campus.

Communication and team building is of course an effective way to cope and deal with stress.

One of the major strengths of the wellness group was that we implemented fun activities that youth often enjoy, such as art making, hiking, and activities that take the students out of their comfort zones a little such as doing reflections and sharing how their life has been going to their fellow classmates. Also, using prizes and raffles as an incentive for participating helped get students interested in the activities. One challenge we faced was giving students directions and having them follow directions properly. Some students often got distracted by their friends and I had to get another staff member to assist the group in making sure that students were listening to directions because certain projects we did required specific directions and we only had an hour to complete them. Managing a budget was difficult because we had to be creative about what

projects we could realistically afford to do and when certain items were out of stock at the store, we had to come up with new ideas in a short amount of time.

The broader issue that this project addressed was that students often lack proper coping skills in academic settings and if this is not addressed early on students can suffer consequences such as being an irresponsible adult. In order to better address this problem further than what my project accomplished, I would recommend that schools implement mentorship programs. I think having an older, successful student who manages their stress well in an academic setting and pairing them up with a younger student who is having difficulty with their behavior in school would be a good way to practice positive self regulation. I recommend this action because a 2010, University of Albany study showed that after pairing 83 middle school students who were facing difficulties in school including behavioral issues with top students at the same school, the students with behavioral issues began to show a more positive trend in attendance, less disciplinary referrals and improved academic performance.

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Appendix

Wellness Group

STARTS: OCTOBER 8, 2019

Learn stress management, coping skills,
self reflection and participate in fun
group activities!

Every Tuesday from
12pm to 12:45pm

FOOD AND DRINK PROVIDED!

*Join
us now!*

CONFERENCE ROOM

Wellness Group Pre/Post Survey:

1. When I am feeling stressed, I know what to do to calm myself down.

Strongly agree (1) Agree (2) Disagree (3) Strongly Disagree (4)

2. I practice self care often.

Strongly agree (1) Agree (2) Disagree (3) Strongly Disagree (4)

3. I am confident in my ability to cope with my emotions.

Strongly agree (1) Agree (2) Disagree (3) Strongly Disagree (4)

4. I am aware of the things that trigger me to feel stressed, upset or anxious.

Strongly agree (1) Agree (2) Disagree (3) Strongly Disagree (4)

5. I have hobbies that help me to escape from my problems.

Strongly agree (1) Agree (2) Disagree (3) Strongly Disagree (4)

Reflection Questions/Focus Group:

Answer the following questions honestly and be ready to share out loud.

As of today, what are some ways you all practice self care and deal with stress/anxiety? Which of these are healthy and which of these are unhealthy?

Was this wellness group helpful in any way? How?

How could this group be more effective in the future?

Scope of Work and Timeline			
Title: Wellness Group for Stress Management and Mental Health Awareness			
Project description: This wellness group was a weekly group that focused on teaching students healthy coping mechanisms, stress management and mental health awareness through various activities such as sharing personal reflections, workshops, physical activity and more.			
Goal: Increase knowledge of coping skills, stress management and mental health awareness			
Primary objective of the project: Students know more about the above topic than they did before, have less incidences of behavioral issues on campus			
Activities		Deliverables	Timeline/deadlines
1	Lectures	Increased knowledge of self	10/5 Pre knowledge survey given

2	Workshops	Learn healthy coping mechanisms	<p>10/15- Introduction to group, students introduced themselves to each other, introduced monthly attendance raffle</p> <p>10/22- Hand art activity, art therapy lecture</p> <p>10/29- Physical activity lecture, Jiu jitsu/ self-defense activity</p> <p>11/5- Nature walk, hiking, healthy eating</p> <p>11/12- Benefits of gardening lecture, planting lettuce and radish seeds activity</p> <p>11/19- Team building lecture, airplane making/throwing activity, human knot activity</p> <p>12/3- Self reflection and sharing</p>
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			<p>presentation, reflection questions and sharing out loud activity</p> <p>12/10- Last day of group, review of all topics presentation</p>
3	Reflections and sharing thoughts	Learn to lower stress levels	12/10- Last day of the group
4	Art therapy	Higher graduation rate	12/10- Post knowledge survey given
5	Physical Activity	Higher retention rate	12/17- Interviews with individual students/ focus group done
6	Surveys	Lower incidences of behavioral issues	<p>10/29- October attendance raffle for Starbucks gift card</p> <p>11/19- November attendance raffle for Starbucks gift card</p> <p>12/10- December attendance raffle for Starbucks gift card</p>

7	Incentive Monthly Raffle		
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