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Mental Health Awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy

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Author Note

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Abstract

Arroyo Seco Academy is an elementary school located in Greenfield (CA) serving students from k through 6th grade. The capstone project and its implementation took place at Arroyo Seco's counseling department. The community that is served by the counseling department is children who experience social and behavioral issues. There School has seen an increase of mental health illness in Monterey County that affects children directly and indirectly. The project; named Mental Health Awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy, consisted of an educational intervention that focused on 6th grade students. The intervention focused on the importance of mental health and touched on the subjects of anxiety, depression, ADD, ADHD, and other mental health illnesses in weekly sessions over a span of six weeks. It is recommended that the agency continues to address students' mental health by incorporating lesson plans into the curriculum or by having the next intern continue to implement the project.

I. Agency Description

Arroyo Seco Academy (ASA) is an elementary school in the Greenfield Unified School District in southern Monterey County. Arroyo Seco Academy is a new elementary school (it is only 2-3 years old). ASA specializes in education from k-6th grade. This internship was specifically centralized in the counseling department.

The mission statement for Arroyo Seco Academy is, “To promote ALL students with high levels of academic and personal achievement through a collaborative system of support, guided by passionate, dedicated staff in a safe, nurturing, and culturally responsive environment that fully prepares students for future college and career success (Greenfield Unified School District, 2018).” The services that Arroyo Seco Academy provides is general K through 6th grade education, and counseling services. The counseling department specializes in helping children with any social, behavioral, emotional, and educational issues the students may present. Based on the severity of the problem or issue the student may be referred to a specialist such as a school psychiatrist/psychologist for further help. The community that is served are students grades K to 6th grade. Most of the students that attend Arroyo Seco Academy are Hispanic/Latino making up 88% of the population (American Fact Finder, 2017.)”

II. Communities Served by the Agency

The community that is primarily served by Arroyo Seco Academy are students k through 6th grade. Arroyo Seco Academy is in Greenfield CA, Monterey County. Greenfield is an agricultural community. About 91% of the community in Greenfield are Hispanic or Latino. The median age in Monterey County is 34. The poverty rate in Monterey County is at 14.7%. “The student population of Monterey County, CA is skewed towards women, with 15,399 male students and 15,904 female students. Most students graduating from Universities in Monterey County, CA are Hispanic or Latino (2,658 and 39.2%), (DataUSA, 2017).” It is estimated that in 2017 47.9% of the population living in Greenfield had a high school degree or equivalent, and 4.1% had a bachelor's degree or higher (American FactFinder, 2017). The median income for a family in Greenfield is \$35,520. Because Greenfield is an agricultural community most of the people that are employed are only employed seasonally by agricultural companies. This means that for 5 months out of the year these individuals are not employed thus making it a low-income community.

III. Problem Description

There has been an increase of mental health illness in Monterey County. “Mental illness is the leading cause of disability in the United States for ages 15-44, (Monterey County Health Department, 2010).” There are many causes that led to the increase of mental health illness in Monterey County. Monterey County is primarily an agricultural community, which means that a lot of the work offered in Monterey County is seasonal. In November 2006 Monterey County saw an increase of 5.8% of unemployment driven by seasonal industries, (The Californian, 2017).” Seasonal work in Monterey County usually begins around April and lasts all the way to the middle of November. That leaves a lot of people out of work for 5 months. In 2016 Salinas had a total of 22,500 unemployed people due to the end of seasonal work.

There are strong correlations between living with low income and having a mental health illness. The lower a person's socioeconomic status, the higher the probability is of the person developing a mental health illness. As stated by DataUSA in 2017, “14.7% of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Monterey County, CA (60.9k out of 415k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 13.4%.” Being of low income places a lot of stress on individuals and families. Income insecurity is one of the leading causes of anxiety and depression. Not knowing when the next meal is going to be, or if they are going to have enough money to pay rent or utility bills places a high level of stress on the family and the provider of the family.

Thirdly, a person's legal status plays an important role in the mental status of the family. Fear of deportation has proven to have a psychological effect on a person's health. Living in fear

in most cases with anxiety and paranoia can have detrimental effects on a person's mental health. There has been an increase of fear of deportation due to recent deportation efforts led by the Trump administration which has added to the rise of mental health illness in Monterey County. Salinas Valley youth who expressed fear and worry about federal immigration policy also experienced higher anxiety levels, sleep problems and blood pressure changes, according to University of California, Berkeley researchers, (The Californian, 2019).

There are many detrimental consequences that can arise if the problem is not addressed properly. First, the lack of access to resources for low income communities makes it difficult for the problem to be properly addressed. If individuals that are already suffering from mental health problems are not getting treated or receiving the proper dosage of medication it could pose potential treats for themselves and other people in society. For example, schizophrenia affects how a person feels, thinks, behaves and at times the person can lose touch from reality this could result in the individual believing their life is in danger and acting out on those impulses. It is at times difficult for a person who is suffering from a mental health illness to conform to society which could in return lead to that individual getting in trouble with the law. In 2015 lawyer and activist Bryan Stevenson said that over 50% of people that are incarcerated suffer from mental illness, (Vick, 2019).

Secondly, if the issue of mental health illness is not properly addressed it could lead to the rise of mental health illness. Mental health is the same as any other illness, if it is not properly addressed at an early stage it will only get worse. There are many serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, depression, and Alzheimer's disease that can have dire consequences on persons quality of life if they are not properly treated. It is estimated that over 45 percent of adults in Monterey County suffer from a mental illness. That number keeps rising every year. A lot of the time people don't seek out mental help due to the negative stigma that surrounds mental health illness. Creating and raising awareness on the importance of mental health could help decrease the prevalence rate of mental health illness in Monterey County.

Lastly, if mental health illness is not properly addressed it could lead to other serious health conditions. Mental health illness does not only affect a person's mental health but also their whole body. Depression has been known to have a strong correlation with obesity. Chronic stress caused by anxiety and depression has been linked to a higher risk of heart attack, and stroke. If a mental health illness is not properly addressed in time it could become more difficult to manage or recover. The mind has many ways of coping with stress. Chronic mental illnesses can lead to gastrointestinal issues, aches and pains that will not present a physical cause.

Untreated mental health illness can make everyday life complicated. It can interfere with a person's ability to stay focused, keep a job, and properly function as a part of society. Untreated

mental health illnesses in any case always affects a person's quality of life. Figure 1 presents the problem model discussed in this section.

Figure 1: Problem Model

Causes/Contributing Factors	Problem statement	Consequences
Seasonal Work	There has been an increase of mental health illness in Monterey County	Rise of Crime/Incarceration
Low Income		Rise of Mental Health Illness
Immigrant Families/ Undocumented		Rise of Other Health Issues

Project Connection with the Problem

The project (Mental Health Awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy) was an educational intervention which highlighted the importance of mental health and self-care. The intervention focused on defining mental health and then going into detail about the most common mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, Alzheimer's and other common mental disorders. This intervention also had a focus on reducing the negative stigma surrounding mental health in the Hispanic community. This educational intervention sought to supply students with the necessary tools to help an individual cope with daily stressors along with knowing when to seek help. Finally the intervention supplied students with resources to mental health clinics.

IV. Capstone Project Description

This capstone project focused on 6th grade students. Mental health awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy was an educational intervention. Students were educated on the importance of mental health; they were evaluated on the first day of implementation. They continued to be educated on the importance of mental health for the following 5 weeks. On the last day of implementation, the students were evaluated once again to measure academic attainment. A curriculum was developed and implemented in a span of five weeks. The project focused on the areas of self-esteem, depression, anxiety, learning disorders, and peer interaction.

Project Justification:

“Rates of youth depression increased from 8.5% in 2011 to 11.1% in 2014. Even with severe depression, 80% of youth are left with no or insufficient treatment (NAMI, 2019)”. In recent months at ASA a high number of students have been referred to the school counselor due to behavioral issues, self-esteem issues, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Greenfield, the city in which Arroyo Seco Academy is located, is primarily of Hispanic/Latino descent. There are many contributing factors such as low economic status, seasonal work, food insecurity, lack of resources, lack of awareness, lack of access to resources. In a Hispanic community mental health is looked at as taboo. In an ever changing society it is important to address issues that could have future positive impacts on society and on individuals.

The primary purpose of Mental Health Awareness was to promote mental health and raise awareness. This was done through in-class presentations, in which students were able to

differentiate between different mental issues/disorders such as anxiety and depression. The main goal was to educate students on mental health and allocate resources. This project helped to remove the negative stigma surrounding mental health in a predominantly Hispanic community.

The agency can expect to achieve basic knowledge of mental health for its 6th grade class. This educational intervention is very important because it is specifically targeted at 6th grade students. These students are in the beginning years of adolescence which has shown to be the years in which children begin to experience chemical changes in the brain, along with different types of mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and body dysmorphic disorder. It will address mental health in a broad perspective. Since mental health is an ongoing ever-changing issue it will provide basic knowledge to students. As stated, it will specifically focus on eliminating the negative stigma surrounding mental health. It will help students become more self-aware of actions, thoughts, and feelings. It will focus on the difference between anxiety and depression, and different ways to manage them.

Benefits:

The main benefit that will transpire from the implementation of mental health Awareness will be that students will have a basic knowledge of mental health. The negative stigma surrounding mental health would be eliminated. Students will be knowledgeable when it comes to differentiating between anxiety and depression. Students will also have the necessary resources when faced with a life event, or on how to manage anxiety. The community can expect

to see an increase in mental health knowledge. They can also expect to see a decrease in behavioral issues in children and adolescence and a better understanding of mental health. The school will be left with a set curriculum for future sixth grade students.

V. Project Implementation

Mental Health Awareness was educational intervention. It looked at a select class of students, in this case it was all 6th grade students in Arroyo Seco Academy, which is a total of three classes (90 students). There was an evaluation in the beginning of the implementation period which took form in the way of a survey. This was followed by five weeks of educational presentations regarding mental health awareness. Finally, on the last day of educational intervention students were once again evaluated to test the knowledge acquired during the implementation period.

Participants:

Participants in this project included all of the 6th grade class in Arroyo Seco Academy. Participation of 6th grade school teachers was also required to get approval to be able to implement educational intervention on mental health awareness. Sixth grade teachers were contacted via email to seek appropriate times and dates for implementation. Approval from the principal was also required to be able to implement educational intervention. Mentor participation was also necessary to guide, give feedback, and support the intern during the

implementation process. Mentor participation was also necessary for approval of dates, times and additional support during the implementation period.

Specific activities that were required for this project to be successful were; building an appropriate curriculum for 6th grade students, setting up dates and times for the implementation period, creating an appropriate survey to evaluate the 6th grade students on the first and last day of implementation, research for data that was used in the curriculum and implemented, Analysis of the data collected at the beginning of implementation and at the end of implementation. Lastly, this capstone project included teaching the curriculum.

Resources:

Resources that were required to implement the project included gathering vital information regarding mental health. This touched on subjects like anxiety, depression, body dysmorphic disorders and many more. Statistics regarding mental health like; who is affected, ways to decrease, control or maintain mental health disorders, and resources necessary to seek help. The location was Arroyo Seco Academy during school hours. The Monterey County of Mental Health was also contacted to provide brochures and resources for students.

Curriculum development and implementation:

The target audience was all three 6th grade classes in Arroyo Seco Academy, that's a total of 90 students. The curriculum consisted of five different topics of mental health. One week was dedicated to each topic. Week one consisted of anxiety, week two was depression, week three was ADHD and ADD, week four was autism and bipolar disorder, and week five was coping

skill and resources. The curriculum was tailored to 6th grade students. All sessions were held on thursday during the students P.E period. All sessions were delivered via powerpoint presentations. Students were able to ask any questions after each presentation.

The pre survey showed that most students had a basic understanding of depression but not anxiety. Only 20% of the students knew what anxiety is, 60% of students knew what depression is, only 15% knew what ADHD and ADD is, and only 10% knew what bipolar and autism is.

Implementation Challenges:

There were many challenges that arose in the beginning of the implementation period. Firstly the first day of implementation kept on getting pushed back due to state testing. Second challenge that arose was in the middle of the implementation period in week three where flexibility with schedules was required in order for all three sixth grade classes to get the presentations during the same week this was due to school events such as field trips and assemblies. Thirdly, the biggest challenge that arose during the implementation period was the “shelter in place” lock down due to Covid-19. Due to the global pandemic of Covid-19 the post surveys were not able to be given or analyzed.

Scope of Work and Timeline:

Table 1 represents the detailed scope of work activities and implementation timeline for the capstone project. Table 1 also shows the project's main goal which is to reduce the negative stigma surrounding mental health and to raise awareness. This was accomplished by creating a

survey that focused on 6th grade student's knowledge regarding mental health at the beginning of implementation and on the last day of implementation. The data was collected and analyzed to see if modifications or improvements needed to be made on the curriculum.

Capstone approval was given no later than October 31st. Information relating to mental health was sought from different agencies and organizations including; Monterey County Behavioral Health Department, NAMI of Monterey, and local Kinship Center. The curriculum was developed by November and was approved by the mentor. The surveys that were used on the first and last day of implementation were developed and approved by November. Implementation of the project began in February 2020 and lasted through March 2020. Data from the first surveys was collected, but the post survey was not collected due to the COVID 19 school closures. Capstone project was completed and ready for the capstone festival in May 2020.

Table 1. Scope of Work and implementation timeline			
Title: Mental Health Awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy			
Project description: Educational Mental Health Intervention			
Goal: To reduce the negative stigma surrounding mental health and to raise awareness.			
Activities		Deliverables	Timeline/deadlines
1	Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor	Final capstone project idea approved	October 31, 2019
2	Research information on Mental Health	Through Monterey County of Mental Health	November 4 th 2019
3	Develop a curriculum	Final approval for curriculum	November 12 th 2019

4	Create survey from day 1 and last day of implementation	Final approval for survey for first and last days of implementation.	November 18 th 2019
5	Implement project/conduct surveys	Implement projects for 6 th grade students and survey the students.	February 20 th 2020 to March 19 th 2020
6	Analyze data received	Compare surveys from the first day of implementation to the last day of implementation.	April 6 th 2020
7	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 2020
8	Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading (posters submitted)	May 2020
9	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final presentation at Capstone Festival!!	May 2020

VI. Reflection of COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Agency and Population Served

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Agency

In March of 2020 the world was faced with the global pandemic of COVID-19. Schools were immediately closed and went into “shelter in place.” Schools across the country were forced into facilitating classes online. South Monterey County was specially not prepared to go into online classes since a large portion of the population is low income. A large portion of the students that attend Arroyo Seco Academy do not have access to computers or the internet. Arroyo Seco Academy quickly developed a plan to supply students with laptops which they would take home and attend their online classes. Because not all students have access to internet busses that carry WIFI access are regularly scheduled to be parked in certain locations around Greenfield to help students connect with their classes.

Impact of COVID-19 on agency clients

COVID-19 had a tremendous impact on Arroyo Seco Academy. Monterey County is primarily an agricultural community and because of COVID-19 agriculture was classified as an essential business. This affected Arroyo Seco Academy because those parents who work in agriculture were still required to go to work. Many of them relied on the fact that their children were at school and safe during the day. Now parents were forced to find someone to take care of their children while they are at work and many of those parents had to quit their job just to make sure there was someone home with their children. There were many concerns that were brought up once “shelter in place”, one of those concerns was food. Since Greenfield is a low income

community many families rely on the schools to supply breakfast and lunch to their children. Arroyo Seco Academy made sure that all students were receiving breakfast and a lunch by arranging a pick up hour for students to pick up breakfast and lunch. The school also provided students with a weekly package of school work for students to work on during the week along with a laptop provided by the school for students to have their weekly skype meetings with their instructors. For those students that did not have internet access the Greenfield Unified School District made sure that there are buses parked around Greenfield that provide WIFI access to students.

Impact of COVID-19 on social problem

Before COVID-19 there had been a rise in mental health illness in Monterey County. During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been some concern with social workers because they are not able to visit their clients, there have also been less reports made to social workers in regards to children's safety. Many have speculated that because people are being forced to "stay home" and quarantine that there has been a rise in mental health illness because people are not able to socialize and are in an enclosed space at home. One month after "shelter in place" people began to protest against quarentaning and staying home. People claim to feel more anxiety and depression while staying at home. Many people deal with depression and anxiety by working out, socializing with friends, hiking, traveling, and staying busy at work, since this is no longer an option people who are prone to anxiety and depression are developing these illnesses again.

Impact of COVID-19 on the agency's future

COVID-19 should be a major learning opportunity not just for California but for the whole United States. The United States was definitely not prepared to face a pandemic such as COVID-19. The United States should prepare for future pandemics by creating a “pandemic workforce” to specifically monitor events such as this. Arroyo Seco Academy should look into developing a virtual counseling program to counseling services to those students who benefit from counseling. There should also be a system in place where social workers are still able to make home visits with the necessary precautions in order to confirm the safety of children at risk. It is times like these where children that were at risk in the first place become more vulnerable.

VII. Recommendations

Recommendations for the agency

Arroyo Seco Academy has benefited from Mental Health Awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy by educating 6th grade students on mental health. The capstone project touched on subjects such as anxiety and depression which helped students better understand how their mental health can affect their everyday life. Mental health awareness gave students the resources necessary to reach out if they were ever faced with a life changing issue/situation. The sixth grade teacher or next intern should continue to implement the educational intervention and build on it. By continuing to implement the intervention it could help to reduce mental health awareness in Monterey County. Advice that anyone working on an educational intervention project might find useful is to always plan and be prepared for last minute changes while in the implementation stages. Flexibility in schedule is also something that is very important while working or interning in a school.

Broader social significance

The rates of mental illness have increased in Monterey County, Mental Health Awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy intervenes to educate sixth grade students on the importance of mental health. Students are educated on the causes of mental illness and ways to cope and are given the resources necessary to seek help. Mental Health Awareness places a major emphasis on self care and coping skills. By continuing to educate students on the importance of mental health the rates of mental health illness in Monterey County could decrease. Before the educational intervention of Mental Health Awareness in Arroyo Seco Academy there was no curriculum being taught on mental health. The project contributed basic education on mental health. Permanently integrating

mental health education into the sixth grade curriculum is another step Monterey County could take to help reduce the rates of mental health illness.

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ALL SECTIONS: APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Please include a glossary of terms, pertinent agency information, problem model, final scope of work (summarizing work completed throughout the year), project budget, project materials, (e.g., promotional flyers, handouts, curriculum, etc.), assessment tools (e.g., surveys, questionnaires), etc.