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Helping Hand for Youth Participants

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Abstract

Rancho Cielo is an agency that works with youth in Monterey County and helps them achieve a shared vision of success. Not enough participants are reaching out to teachers when they need help to have a more successful experience. Participants are not taking advantage or using the resources that are offered. This affects the participants and the agency as a whole. Some contributing factors are lack of trust on the staff members, not having a good connection between staff and students, and language barriers. The consequences to this issue are that participants are not learning, their assignments are incomplete, they receive a lower grade, their graduation plan is delayed, and it can jeopardize finishing school. A project that could help this issue is starting a “big brother/sister” program to help new incoming students until graduation. It has been found that students need extra encouragement and assistance. When students have additional assistance they tend to do better academically. The staff will need to come up with a timeline of what is expected by students and by when it should be completed. The students who will be the “big brother/sister” will be getting extra credit and may even get a salary. The outcomes are students being more confident and comfortable with staff and peers on campus. Students will take advantage of the resources that are provided to them.

Keywords: Youth, non-profit organization, vocational training, resources, tutoring

Agency & Communities Served

Rancho Cielo is a non-profit organization that serves the underserved and disconnected youth in Monterey County who share the same vision of success. Their mission is to promote self-sufficiency and self-esteem for all young adults. They provide youth with vocational training with industry professionals, mental health counseling, probation case management and support, job readiness, life skills, physical activity, enrichment activities, connections to health, and social and family services. (Rancho Cielo, 2016). Rancho Cielo helps their participants reach their goals through diploma education to those up to twenty-four years of age and offers housing options to those in need. The Rancho Cielo Transitional Housing Village has twenty-two residential beds and 8,030 safe nights' rest per year for students or graduates who are in unsafe neighborhoods or are homeless. (Rancho Cielo, 2016). The vocational training they offer for job certifications are culinary, agriculture processing and mechanics, construction, and youth corps. This program is a great example of what a public service should do for the community.

Participants' income distribution is 69% very low income, at a poverty level of one person earning \$9,645 per year or a four person household earning \$19,307 per year. There are 31% low income, below a self-sufficient standard one person earning \$21,706 per year or a four person household earning less than \$50,000. Nearly 70% of students fall in the Federal HUD category of very low income at poverty level. There are 25% of participants that fall in the low-income, below a self sufficient standard. They have a 74% male population and a 26% female. 80% of the population served at Rancho Cielo are Latinos and are from Salinas. 51% of participants are fifteen to seventeen years old, and 49% are eighteen to twenty-five years old.

42% of participants are on probation. They get their funding through grants from the government, county, donations, and fundraisers. The operation revenue is 33% of contributions, 29% special events, 23% grants, and 15% of earned revenue. (Rancho Cielo, 2016).

Problem Description

One identified problem in this program is that not enough participants are reaching out to teachers or assistants when they need help to have a more thriving experience. Participants are not taking advantage of or using the resources that are offered at Rancho Cielo. The lack of participation is a big issue because students may not be as successful as they could be. The people affected by this problem are the participants and the agency itself. As mentioned by Bruff, “The ability to find and evaluate resources for learning is a necessary skill for lifelong learning and effective work in many fields.”(Bruff, 2006). According to Data Quest, on average 300 seniors in the Salinas Union High School District do not graduate each year, according to figures that were updated through 2018. Research shows that high school dropout rates affect the funding of schools. According to Medina, the average high school dropout has an income of \$20,241 compared to the average high school graduate that makes \$36,424.

Contributing Factors

One contributing factor for this problem is lack of trust with the staff. Students must be able to trust the staff in order to efficiently communicate with them. Being comfortable with their teachers will allow them to ask questions and seek help when needed.

Another contributing factor is staff not having a good connection with the students. Establishing a relationship or bond with the students is important because they will start trusting

you and open up to you. If youth do not trust their tutors or teachers, then they will not allow them to help and will not seek help.

Another barrier to why participants do not use the available resources is because there are a few that have trouble speaking English and tend to feel more intimidated to speak up and collaborate. Other participants are on probation or families and do not take the time to research resources, either because they do not have it or because they have a lot going on. An article by Carnegie Mellon University states, “students who are shy or introverted, self-conscious, embarrassed by their performance, fearful of looking stupid, etc., may not seek help from you or others on campus.” (Carnegie Mellon University, 2021). Another source mentions that cultural background or gender can also be factors. (Eberly Center, 2021). For example, students who are part of a minority group may be less likely to seek help, especially if they feel different.

Consequences

When they do not ask for help, participants are not learning as well, their assignments are incomplete, they receive a lower grade, their graduation plan is delayed, and it can jeopardize finishing school. For example, throughout the pandemic students have had to meet virtually for their classes. Tutoring throughout the pandemic is difficult because the students do not know you personally, and this does not help with building trust because most students keep their cameras off and barely want to take themselves off mute. Also, establishing a routine may create trust or acknowledgement that the tutor meets on a particular day. Another consequence to this issue is that the program received funding for how many students are attending class and are being successful. This is an issue when they are skipping classes because they do not understand a subject or because they are not passing the course. They may feel as if they have no point in

trying harder and only do the minimum to pass the course. A consequence to not using the resources would be removal of funding since participants are not signing up for. Bruff mentions in an article that “For students to be able to use multiple resources, it is essential to help them acquire information literacy skills, to provide proper assignments, and for the instructor to serve as a coach as well as a teacher.” (Bruff, 2006).

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Lack of connection/relationships	Too many underserved and disconnected youth in Monterey County dropout of high school and do not use resources available	Poor academics
Language barrier/ cultural differences		Not graduating
Under-usage of resources		Lack of funding

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

A project that could help with bettering this issue is starting a “big brother/sister” program to help new incoming students on orientation day and for the rest of the program until graduation. The “big brother/sister” volunteer would be a participant who is about to graduate with good grades and will be paid off with extra credit points. They will be checking up on the new students who are assigned to them and make sure that they are well-aware of all the resources provided by the program and have them sign up for at least one of them. Another responsibility would be to check up on them on a regular basis, three times a week through email or text and see their progress. They would have to meet with their assigned participants once a week for two hours. All “big brother/sister” volunteers will be assigned five or six students only to make sure that they have enough time to communicate and mentor every student individually.

Project Purpose

This project will build stronger relationships with participants and staff. They will be more confident and comfortable interacting with their peers as well as staff members. The “big brother/sister” idea would give participants a better understanding and opportunity to use resources and ask questions without doing it in front of the whole group. Their assignments will be checked on a daily basis and the “big brother/sister” will be able to identify if they are understanding the subject and because they are peers, perhaps the new student will be more open to questions. This idea has been used by Jesuit High School where seniors start out serving as a tour guide for the first few weeks of the school year and for some, the pairing turns into an authentic friendship.(Jesuit Magazine, 2019). The freshmen and seniors gain from the connection

and develop a bond that lasts longer than just school. Each senior is paired with two freshmen during orientation and for their retreat weekend.

Project Justification

One review that the high school received from a new student after the orientation was over was, “My Big Brother was a great help and I knew I could go to him whether it was about things in high school or life in general. I knew he was always there to help me.” (Jesuit Magazine, 2019). Another student shared, “At orientation he showed me everything, with lots of tips, and it was just so easy thinking that I am okay and can do everything by myself now.” (Jesuit Magazine, 2019). This citation addresses the lack of bonds and cultural differences.

Project Implementation

To implement this project the staff would need to identify good candidates to play the role as mentors and interview them as an employment offer. They will need a high GPA and great attendance in order to qualify for this role. There will also be other qualifications such as knowing how to explain certain subjects when tutoring. The staff will need to come up with a timeline of what is expected by students and by when it should be completed. The students who will be the “big brother/sister” will be getting extra credit for being a part of the program and the staff will also need to calculate how much extra credit they can give and/or if they can also afford a wage. The way the project will work is as follows, new students will be assigned a big brother/sister on their first day. The volunteer will check in three times a week with the new student and meet in person with their student once a week for two hours to review materials. To make sure that students are using resources, the big brother/sister will explain available resources and have new students sign up for something within the first month of participation.

Assessment Plan

Effectiveness will be measured by having students fill out a weekly survey to see how helpful the “big brother/sister” is and their response time when asked for help. The “big brother/sister” will have to document every time they have an interaction with their assigned students and give a short description of how the interaction took place. Teachers and advisors will meet with the new students and see their progress. Also, reviewing students' success before the “big brother/sister” program and after participating in it. The “big brother/sister” will also have to meet with teachers and see what methods are working and what areas need improvement.

Expected Outcomes

This project should make new students become more confident and comfortable with staff and peers on campus. The goal is to have all students take advantage of the resources that are provided to them and that are overseen often. Students would reach out to teachers and tutors when they need help on assignments. They would be more comfortable with going on educational field trips. Their academics would improve by letting staff members tutoring them on subjects that are more difficult for them. This would be measured through surveys and academic reports on students who attend extra curricular vs the ones that don't. The feedback expected from participants and staff would be educational to better understand each other's goals.

Project Results

As a result of this project, there was a successful outcome. The project did achieve the outcome because students had a higher graduation rate using all the resources available. The survey shows that students do not use the resources available to them as often as the students

when they are in the “big sister/brother” program. Students learned subjects that were more difficult to them and passed their classes with good grades. The available resources were used by students and everyone got more comfortable with each other.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Overall, participants are reaching out to teachers or assistants when they need help to have a more thriving experience. This issue relates to other public agencies and schools that are working with youth as well. The lack of interaction between staff and students can be caused by lack of trust, not having a good connection, language barrier or cultural differences. The Monterey County high school dropout is still impacting underserved and disadvantaged youth. This problem affects the students themselves and the agency or institution. For example, funding will get taken away from the program because participants stop going or they are not passing. Also, the students’ academic performance will show poorly because they do not get the help they need. Lastly, students will not graduate and may have to repeat the school year. A project that will help address this problem is a “big brother/sister” program to help new incoming students on orientation day and for the rest of the program until graduation. The “big brother/sister” mentor would be a student who is about to graduate with good grades and will earn extra credit points. They will be checking up on the new students who are assigned to them to make sure that they are well-aware of all the resources provided by the program and have them sign up for at least one of them. After that, they will be checking up on them weekly to review assignments and complete quizzes together. Implementing this project would require the staff to identify appropriate candidates to play the role as mentors and have professional interviews for them.

Effectiveness will be measured by having students fill out weekly surveys to see how efficient the “big brother/sister” is. The “big brother/sister” will have to document every time they have an interaction and they both need to sign it. This project should make new students become more confident and comfortable with staff and peers on campus. The goal is to have all students take advantage of the resources that are provided to them and that are overseen often.

Personal Reflection

What I learned about the problem is that many students all over the world feel unsure of what activities to do in school. Many students feel intimidated to ask for help when they are having trouble on some subjects. Teachers and tutors are available to them, but they would rather struggle on their own to complete assignments and many times they do not finish. This becomes a problem when their academics show poor conduct. The project is a big brother/sister program that will help guide students throughout their first years at school. The big brother/sister mentor is also a student who is about to graduate and checks in on new students. They meet weekly and go over assignments together and have monthly surveys to receive feedback from students. As Barile mentioned, “School resources are absolutely essential for student collaboration and research.”(Barile, N.d).

The strengths of my project design is that students will feel more comfortable because the help is coming from someone who can relate to them because they are also students and are closer to age. Connections are built through trust and comfort and this project allows students to feel equal and may listen better. The constant interaction makes students feel more comfortable to share their difficulties and get better help.

The challenge to this project design is that students cannot be forced to engage with their “mentor” and it is totally up to them to put their part. They can get as much help and resources available to them, but if they do not want to interact with them then they do not have to. The weekly meetings will help because the “mentors” can see the energy that the student is giving them. That will help them address the issue and target the population in the best way possible.

The broader health and social issue that my project addresses is the underserved and disconnected youth in Monterey County high school dropout. What more could be done is assign students to extra sources and make it be a mandatory workshop that will also help their academics. My advice to future capstone students is to not overthink the project and try to get feedback from their mentor.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Program proposal-meeting			
Choosing qualified candidates for “mentor” role		On first day new student will be assigned a big brother/sister	
Building a timeline for students progress	Monthly surveys	Volunteer will check in three times a week with new student	“Big brother/sister” volunteer
Resource introductions	Weekly meetings	Volunteer will meet in person with new student once a week for 2 hours to review materials/ do homework	Teacher/assistant
Extra credit/wage review	Feedback	Volunteer will explain resources and have new student sign up for something within the first month	Advisors
Orientations/Trainings			
Student check-ins			
Tutoring			
Meetings			