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Cindy Garcia
California State University, Monterey Bay

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Girls Support Group

Cindy Garcia Chavez

Taylor Farms: Center for Learning and Greg Powell

Collaborative Health & Human Services

Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy

California State University Monterey Bay

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Author Note

Cindy Garcia Chavez, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State University Monterey Bay. This research was supported by Taylor Farms: Center for Learning. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Cindy Garcia Chavez, California State University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA, 93955. Contact: cgarciachavez@csumb.edu.

Abstract

The purpose of this capstone project is to keep girls connected with other girls through zoom. Due to the pandemic, schools were closed and a lot of the girls became isolated from their peers as well as after school activities. The project addresses the main consequences of the shelter in place order which are social isolation, mental, and emotional health. The project promotes coping skills to help them stay connected and adapt to this new way of living. Adjusting to a new way of living can be hard for young girls affecting them both mentally and emotionally. This can have consequences like feeling moody and lacking interest in activities. The capstone project provided a Girls Support Group program at Taylor Farms: Learning Center for Learning. This group discusses important concepts that are relevant to the girls such as building self-esteem, self-care and a few more. The expected outcomes were to create a safe and comfortable environment for the girls to interact with each other. Overall 100% percent of the girls felt safe in the group. The findings and recommendations can be more effective if the girls group was in person to have hands-on activities for the girls.

Keywords: Girls Group, Pandemic, Shelter in Place

Agency & Communities Served

The Taylor Farms Center for Learning is a non-profit agency. The agency is located at 1551 Beacon Hill Dr, Salinas, Ca, 93905 where they serve ages seven through twenty-two. The Future Citizen Foundation mission is “To offer young people of Monterey County opportunities for a better future” (Future Citizen Foundation, 2018). To accomplish their mission they manage three different programs which are the First Monterey Tee, Pay it forward Scholarships and Mentoring, and Taylor Farms Learning center. Each program has a diversity of services. For a child to participate in a program, parents/guardians must sign them up in a program that best meets their needs. “The First Monterey Tee program focuses on giving the young people of all backgrounds opportunities to develop, through golf skills, character education, and life-enhancing values such as honesty, integrity, and sportsmanship” (Future Citizen Foundation, 2018). “The Taylor Farms Center for Learning mainly focuses on these three pillars; Academia, Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics, and Life Exploration and Preparation. It is equipped with the latest technology that is created to visualize learning” (Future Citizen Foundation, 2018). The Pay it Forward Scholarship and Mentoring program provides financial help for first generation students who will be attending California State University of Monterey Bay for four years. I will be continuing the Girls Group at Taylor Farms Center for Learning for fourth graders and higher.

The community that is being served is East Salinas in California, which is where the Alisal school district is located. The Alisal school district has many farm working families who do not have higher education making it hard to assist their children with school work and understand the concepts that are taught to their children. According to the United States Census

(2019), 59.2% of 25 years old and up have a high school diploma and 13.3% 25 years and up have a bachelor's degree or higher. The Alisal District is in a direct partnership with the Center of Learning. This association permits the students access to their grades and homework assignments. The primary population being served is Hispanic or Latino. According to the United States Census Quick facts (2019), 79.3% identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino and 37.4% identify as white only. The Taylor Farms Center for Learning accepts middle school students but mainly focuses on grades second to fifth. "In 2019, the total number of students served was 665" (Future Citizen Foundation, 2018). The agency is continuing to aspire for students' success through activities that contribute to their learning.

Problem Description

Youth girls' self esteem have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The youth girls at the Center for Learning have been dealing with isolation during this lockdown. These issues include mental health, lack of physical health, and no social interactions. Many do not have someone to interact with at home. This leads to stress and anxiety for the youth. "Latinos ages 10 through 19 representing nearly 40 percent of the total deaths by suicide among Californians in this age range in 2017" (California Health Report par.1). "Latino females in grades 9-12 had the highest rate of suicidal ideation, at 25.6 percent, compared to 22.8 percent among their white peers" (Salud America par.1). Remote learning, lockdowns and pandemic uncertainty have increased anxiety, and depression among young girls.

Contributing Factors

A contributing factor that is affecting the self esteem of the girls is School closure. School closures have meant that children stayed at home with parents and caregivers who had to

juggle caretaking, learning supervision, and potential telework responsibilities. According to the U.S. Census (2019), nearly 93% of people in households with school-age children reported their children engaged in some form of “distance learning” from home. Having to switch to online learning in the middle of the school year affected the learning development of all students.

“One-on-one relationships empower students to take control of their studies, have the confidence to communicate what they need, and receive the personalized attention that will enable them to succeed” (Kimberly White, 2019). This can lead some students to fall behind and feel isolated from their peers and teachers. According to the Center for Global Development (2020), during school closures, hispanic/latino girls may be tasked with more household work, including childcare, which can further cut into learning time.

One more contributing factor is lack of online resources for young girls in Salinas. Most resources are aimed for high school girls such as Girls Inc. In addition, the resources like the boys and girls club don't directly focus on the emotional/mental health of young girls. The lack of resources does not give the girls opportunity to make social connections in person, especially now with this pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) found that, from April to October 2020, hospitals across the U.S. saw a 24% increase in the proportion of mental health emergency visits for children ages 5 to 11. Culture plays a big role when it comes to mental health issues because hispanic families don't take mental health issues seriously. It can be tough for young girls to deal with mental/emotional issues that can't be discussed with an adult at home. Young girls need someone they can trust to open up about their emotions and boost their self-esteem. The lack of resources here in Salinas does not give these young girls the support they need to get through this pandemic.

Finally, the last contributing factor is the quarantine implementation in California. Recreational options such as pools and playgrounds have been closed during the pandemic. Making young children stay at home and use social devices to entertain themselves. Social media/T.V play a big role in self esteem because girls can be affected easily by what they see. For example, if an instagram model looks too perfect, the young girl might look at herself and not feel confident with how she looks. According to the Common Sense Census (2019), “Smartphone ownership has grown substantially over the past four years among all ages, increasing from 24% of all 8- to 12-year-olds in 2015 to 41% today, and from 67% to 84% among 13- to 18-year-olds”. Meaning that young girls are likely to experience negative impacts on their self esteem and self image and lead to anxiety and depression.

Consequences

A consequence that happens is isolation. Due to this, girls feel caged in their own home, which results in them to feel secluded from the outside world. Isolation opens up the doors to other complications such as depression. According to the Center for Disease and Prevention (2019), “3.2% of children aged 3-17 years (approximately 1.9 million) have diagnosed depression”. It can be difficult for young girls to be socially isolated from their school peers or other family members. In a discussion with one of the girls in my household, she mentioned that she isolates herself by watching Youtube or Tiktok . “7.1% of children aged 3-17 years (approximately 4.4 million) have diagnosed anxiety” (Data and statistics on Children’s mental Health, CDC, 2019). These girls have no social interactions with other girls. There is just so little to do outside when there is a shelter-in-place order, especially for young girls who are going through developmental changes.

Another consequence is their mental well-being. Due to the fact that the girls are facing challenges at home, they might start to show mental health issues. Mental health issues were already among children and youth. According to the KidsData (2020), In 2018, there were 41,087 hospital discharges for mental health issues among California youth ages 5-19, a 38% increase in the last decade. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the numbers have risen. “37.0% of females in California in 7th grade feel depressed” (KidsData, 2019). Depression is shown to be one of the most common emotional health problems among the youth. This is why it's important for these girls to have strong relationships with someone in whom they can trust. It can be a family member, parents, brother, sisters, or a close friend that can help them get through this pandemic.

Lastly, another consequence is their physical well being. Due to the shelter in place implementation, recreational activities have been closed down. This means that girls had to stop joining sports or after school activities that they were involved in. These girls' social activities had to come to an end affecting their physical well being. Lack of physical activity leads to health problems like obesity leading to chronic disease that can affect them later on. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), Nearly 1 in 4 children (aged 2 to 5) are overweight or have obesity. One of the benefits for children staying physically active is reducing the risk of depression. Young girls need to be involved in activities where they can be physically active during this pandemic. Physical activity can help improve a girl's self-esteem, body confidence, and self-expression. Physical activity will help the girls achieve a positive self - concept and promote psychological well being.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
School closure	Covid-19 affects the self esteem of young girls.	Social Isolation
Lack of resources		Mental well being
Shelter-in-place-order		Physical well being

Capstone Project Description and Justification**Capstone Project**

This capstone project will provide a Girl's Support Group. The Girl Support Group addressed the problem because it's created for girls to learn from each other and give one another support and guidance to make the best of each day. It will allow them to rely on one another for support rather than dealing with their feelings by themselves. The group will learn about positive self-respect for each other and themselves. The support group will be measured by questionnaires at the end of each session.

Project Purpose

The Girls Support Group addressed the consequences of social isolation that the girls are having due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Girls Support Group addresses these issues because it will allow the girls to connect with each other through an online platform. This will decrease their social isolation because they will virtually meet someone to connect with. The girls will not feel loneliness because they will virtually be surrounded by other girls. The girls needed to have a place where they felt safe and be surrounded by other people virtually. The online platform needs to be safe so the girls can have their space to discuss stories. The project is recommended

to be through a known platform like zoom. Zoom is used by a lot of schools, in which lecture classes can be done.

Project Justification

The Girls Support Group encourages grades four and higher to feel more virtually connected through the activities. Girls Inc. focuses on activities restoring healthy living, academia enrichment, and life skills instructions. Girls Inc. has helped over thousands of girls nationwide figure out their true potential while reminding them they matter. Girls Inc. is an example of how young girls need mentors and encouragement to put their best foot forward even though the circumstances are difficult. Girls scouts have a similar approach. Girls scouts core values are to help young girls develop a strong sense of self, form and maintain healthy relationships and learn from setbacks. These two organizations are evidence based that young girls can have a positive change with the right support and resources that the Girls Support Group provides.

Project Implementation

The agency had a former Girls Support Program within the fourth and higher grade girls because they had noticed negative issues at home and school. The agency wants to keep implementing a Girls Support Group because it came out to be a success. It is important to make sure that there are fourth and higher grade girls interested in participating in the group. To do this, I will reach out to the parents so they know that this program will be continuing. I will also do a survey that will be sent to the girls to hear what outcomes they expect from this year's program. The program will discuss topics related to self-esteem, coping mechanisms, physical appearance and other topics. To implement this program, lesson plans with topics will be

prepared for each session. A discussion with the mentor overseeing the program has taken place to discuss finances and resources to receive materials. There are a variety of steps such as lesson plans, recording sessions, materials and surveys taking place in order to have a reasonable timeframe for implementation. A detailed implementation plan and timeline will be seen in scope of work in appendix A.

Assessment Plan

To calculate effectiveness, there will be weekly check in with the girls through zoom to see how they are feeling during this program. The girls will be able to share emojis to let us know how they feel. To determine the benefits of this program, the girls will be given a survey at the end of every session to measure if the group was working in the areas of building social skills and building their self esteem. The girls will have the opportunity to select an emoji at the end of each session to share how they are feeling. The zoom meeting will be restricted, so that the girls are comfortable and safe during the time being.

Expected Outcomes

The Girls Support Group program will allow girls in grades fourth and higher to stay connected with other girls during this order of shelter in place. This online girls group will let them connect with each other and support each other. This virtual program will create a safe place for girls to socialize and then will create a bond with each other. This will allow them to build their social skills and build friendships that can last forever. This project will continue to connect and support the girls through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Project Results

The activities organized for the Girls Support Group were a total of five themes related to girl's lives. These themes consist of promoting self-esteem, self-care importance, self-love, sending kindness, Covid-19 safety. The general implementation process was to first build a trusting relationship with the girls. For the Girls Group to get started, the online curriculum had to be applicable to the girls participating. The expected project outcomes are for the girls to stay connected with each other during Covid-19. As well as feel comfortable with each other to share their own experiences during this shelter in place order.

The picture in mind was to facilitate a girls group in person, but due to Covid-19 it is now turned into an online curriculum. Each session was 30 minutes max. The curriculum contains the goal, opening, list of materials, activities, discussion, and the end of the session. The curriculum will also have a group rules contract and the peer support group rules. For example, be respectful of group members, don't break group member confidentiality, only talk about group members that are present, etc. Taylor Farms Learning Center's staff will be there as I facilitate the group. The organization had a girls support group in the past, so there might be some girls that will participate again. This will be a different experience for the girls since it will be online. The online curriculum was made analytically of a way to keep the girls safe during this pandemic.

The online curriculum was a success, there were not a lot of participants like I had planned, but the goal of this curriculum was met. The shelter-in-place had an impact on the girls being isolated from activities/sports etc. things they enjoyed doing. The curriculum has certain topics that are related to helping the girls engage in online activities prior to increasing girls engagement behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. This online curriculum is for girls to

build friendships and trusting relationships with other girls, making shelter-in-place more engaging for the girls.

The girls group had previously been in person, but this time it will be online to keep the girls safe. In order to measure if Girls Group was effective, the girls will be given a five question survey that will be in the chat box after each session. The questions will consist of: if they were happy in the girls group, did they feel safe in the group, did they feel comfortable sharing in the group, do they trust other girls in the group, and if they are learning in the group. The questions were set up with the choices of a thumbs up or a thumbs down emoji. The surveys all showed positive moods and behaviors. The girls all learned something from each session. They felt comfortable which was very important for this project.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Based on how successful the last Girls Support Group was, this year's girls group was as successful as well. I am excited I got to help these girls feel more engaged with each other. At the end of the sessions the girls felt comfortable and safe in this zoom atmosphere. The girls who attend regularly enjoyed this space where they are meeting new friends or old friends. This can be a challenging time for these young girls and they need some space devoted to them to talk about their days and any other issues affecting them. To improve the Girls Support Group is to have an employee support the intern in brainstorming ideas for the girls to discuss and to prepare activities prior to facilitating. With this online curriculum it was hard to have a materials list for the girls because not all girls were going to have the materials at home. I will consider doing the Girls Group in person just because it will be easier to have the basic materials there to complete the activities. Another thing is that there are a lot of concepts that can be beneficial for the girls,

considering having this program every year can be useful for the girls at Taylor Farms learning center.

Personal Reflection

1. I learned that young girls are not meant to be isolated from other peers. The shelter in place impacts their mental health, physical health and emotional health. The school closure was alarming not only for the girls but for the parents as well. The new normal was online classes. Girls were being challenged to learn at home, affecting their social skills they had been practicing at school. I planned the online curriculum for the girls to be mentally, physically, and emotionally healthy. The implementation of this Girls Support Group was meant to be a person, but for the girls safety it is an online Girls Support Group program. It will be a different atmosphere but it will still be a safe and comfortable environment for the girls to talk about the six themes I have prepared for them. This project contributes to the agency because it will be a safe space and it will be an ongoing after school program at the agency for girls only.
2. The strengths of my project are the themes that are beneficial for the girls to keep practicing and discussing with other friends who perhaps did not join the group. This will be a good experience to have in their lives because they will learn important skills to become leaders in their own communities one day. The activities are simple but very informative to get them to practice what we are discussing in teams. The hands-on activities can really help them to understand the concepts better. This will help to get the best outcomes for my project.
3. Some of the challenges were the materials list, since the Girls Support group was online, it was difficult to list materials that maybe not all girls had at home. The main challenge was not having the Girls Support Group program in person, this could have made a few things better. In my case I was not able to meet the girls and did not get to bond with them for a while. This can Limitations/challenges: Discuss the limitations/challenges to your project design, activities or methods and how you addressed them.
4. Broader social significance:
 - a) The social issue that the project relates to is Covid-19 affecting the self esteem of young girls. To address this problem, Girls Group was something I wanted to work on because it helped the girls stay connected through zoom. The girls group is really about them and for them to feel comfortable in this online environment is the most important thing for me.
 - b) Something that could have been done was making some educational videos that the girls could do with their family. Another idea beside the girls group was to make youtube videos with content like baking, skin care night/morning routine, yoga exercise and other activities that will make them feel good about themselves and bring up their self esteem.
 - c) Some beneficial advice I would give to future capstone students would be to meet their mentor and just get to know them on a professional level. As well as have an

idea to discuss with your mentor of what issue you want to address for your capstone. I believe this is very important for your professional growth. And always ask questions, don't be shy or scared. You are there to gain experience from your mentors.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Developed curriculum	Google document	Ongoing	Greg Powell

Researched theme for girls group	List of theme for each session	Ongoing	Greg Powell
Encourage participants to sign up	Reached out to parents through Gmail	Last week of november	Greg Powell
Post surveys at the end of each session	Gather data before and after to see the effectiveness of the session	Ongoing	Greg Powell
Curriculum: Promoting self esteem	Mirror activity, in which the girls wrote their name in the middle of the paper, then decorated the outside with pictures, drawings, or images that described who they are.	November 29	Greg Powell
Curriculum: Self-care importance	Practiced simple yoga exercises	November 30	Greg Powell
Curriculum: Self-love	Heart affirmation tree worksheet	December 1	Greg Powell
Curriculum: Sending Kindness	The girls had to practice sending kindness the next day in school. Then share on the next session with the group.	December 2	Greg Powell
Curriculum: Covid-19	Watched a brain pop video then had a mini quiz on the importance of staying 6ft apart and wearing a mask. This was an educational lesson.	December 3	Greg Powell
Curriculum: Survival tips for next group	The girls shared some important comments about the online curriculum. Brainstormed possible curriculums for the next cohort.	December 3	Greg Powell
Finals Girls group curriculum	Digital curriculum	Late December	Greg Powell