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## **The Changemaker Academy: Youth Leadership and Advocacy Programs**

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The Changemaker Academy

A Hybrid online Youth Leadership and Health Advocacy Program

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Growing Greatness ~ Kymberly Lacrosse

Collaborative Health & Human Services

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### **Abstract**

The internship was completed at Growing Greatness, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization located in Watsonville, Ca. They facilitate in-person and on-site leadership and advocacy workshops for school educators, youth organizations, foster and homeless youth throughout Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. Growing Greatness teaches leadership and health advocacy workshops for youth ages 12-20 who attend middle and high schools living in Watsonville, Ca. . The problem addressed is the continued lack of leadership and health advocacy programs offered to at-risk youth in the Watsonville Ca. community. The contributing factors are a competitive environment for nonprofits seeking funding for after-school academic programs from state and federal agencies and promoting the importance of these programs is that leadership and health advocacy programs contribute to positive development. The consequences are not providing these programs is students becoming disengaged from school and community, causing delinquent behavior and increasing dropout rates. Also, the loss of free resources to become active leaders in their community before becoming adults and/or going to college. Another consequence is the large Hispanic/Latinx community of underserved youth are left without a voice for an equitable change. The capstone project is to create a hybrid online leadership and advocacy workshop titled, The Changemaker academy. First by creating a master PowerPoint presentation from the curriculum "Do Kit" from Growing Greatness in-person workshops for use in an online learning environment. Secondly, add additional PowerPoint presentations from sections of the Growing Greatness Do Kit. A barrier for implementing the project is the continued COVID -19 in-person restrictions placed on schools during the 2021 school year. The findings of the project results are from a survey completed by CSUMB undergraduates in the Collaborate Health and Human Services program. Future recommendations would be for Growing Greatness to add two interns from CSUMB for the spring 2022 semester and increase funding by applying for educational grants. Also, continue to create an online course curriculum with several individual PowerPoint presentations outlining each section using the master Do Kit presentation.

*Keywords:* Advocacy, Leadership, Hispanic Youth, After-school Programs

### **Agency & Communities Served**

Growing Greatness is a nonprofit organization created in 2016 by Kymberly Lacrosse. Located in Watsonville, Ca, Growing Greatness teaches youth leadership skills and capacity building to facilitate community change. Lacrosse created Growing Greatness after working from 2008-2016 with the United Way of Santa Cruz County in their Jovenes Sanos program. Lacrosse created a 137-page workbook titled “DO KIT”, to use during her in-person workshops. Lacrosse uses her previous experience and education to provide innovative and transformative workshops and training for youth in after-school groups and non-profit youth organizations in Watsonville, Ca. Growing Greatness works with youth one on one to inspire action and grow leadership capacity for both individuals and groups sourced from equity and justice. Their vision is “ A thriving world of people and communities living from equity and justice”, This is why they focus on leadership, organizational, and personal capacity building, including strength-based personal development. The Growing Greatness mission statement is “ Growing Greatness stands for equity and justice and is manifesting the Greatness that exists within each of us and our communities. “ ( Growing Greatness, 2020). Growing Greatness workshops are offered on the site of the organization or school. They have also hosted day camps during the summer with Santa Cruz County foster youth. In addition, growing Greatness offers in-person training workshops for non-profit organizations working with adult allies and educators in middle and high schools. The city of Watsonville has a total population of 53,452, of which 81.9% are Hispanic or Latino, according to the Census 2020 Hard-to-Count Fact Sheet. (2020, April). As of 2020, 33.3% of the population lives at 150% below the poverty level. In addition, 40.7% of residents 25 years and over are not high school graduates and 12.9% of persons 25 years or more have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

## **Problem Description**

Underserved and economically disadvantaged youth in Watsonville lack access to leadership and health advocacy programs. In California, schools have been closed for in-person instruction since March of 2020. The Pajaro Valley school district, like most of the school districts across the country, has been closed for in-person learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic social distancing restrictions. These state-wide restrictions have caused Growing Greatness, their after-school youth training workshops, unable to operate during the 2020 - 2021 school year until an online hybrid curriculum can be developed. Creating a hybrid program will allow youth leadership and health advocacy programs to be taught online and when available in person. This will give youth access to these much-needed programs.

## **Contributing Factors**

Funding options for nonprofits tend to be very competitive. The state and federal governments offer some financial assistance programs to help non-profit agencies. State programs like Afterschool Education and Safety (ASES) fund, and in addition, the federal government offers two federal grants, the 21st Century Learning Center ( 21 CCLC) grant and the After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens ( ASSET) grant. (PVUSD. 2021). In the city of Watsonville, Ca, local schools in the Pajaro Valley School District (PVSD) use these resources to fund their afterschool programs. The Extended Learning Department offers students a variety of programs after school, including homework support, science lessons, and robotic technologies. (PVSD,2021).

Lack of local stakeholder involvement from community leaders, large corporations, and family members of students has contributed to the difficulties in providing youth with accessible leadership and health advocacy programs. (Y.L.A.). Students need to have mentors, leadership, and advocacy programs available in schools. These programs can assist schools in teaching skills required to enter college and acquire higher-paying employment. After-school advocacy and leadership programs are developed for youth in middle and high schools. These programs are intended to bring awareness of the many social, civic, and health disparities in their community and county. Y.L.A . programs online will also allow youth to meet other students who share the same interests and vision about the world in which they live. According to Afterschool Alliance, *Building Workforce Skills and Inspiring Future Careers* (Afterschool Alliance, 2020), employers have reported gaps in job skills from recent graduates. In a 2020 Jobs Outlook survey, by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, over 90% of employers felt these four skills were essential and found that only 60% were proficient in critical thinking/problem solving, 85% in teamwork and collaboration, 49% in communication skills and only 56% of employers felt that the 30% of students were proficient in leadership skills. (Afterschool Alliance, 2020). Leadership and Advocacy programs help prepare students for their transition to adulthood by giving them professional communication and professional development exercises. They can learn to write professional letters to public officials addressing their concerns about a specific issue affecting the community. They will learn the importance of attending local city council meetings and meeting the people who make the critical decisions in their community.

Leadership and advocacy workshops help youth stay active in their schools and proactive in social causes for their community. The workshops help keep youth engaged in school and prepare them to manage time, set goals, and learn to work in teams. Youth

leadership and advocacy programs can prepare youth for college and some of the challenges of becoming an adult. Students can be taught usable skills such as creating effective presentations, facilitating meetings, researching data, navigating the internet, and understanding the professional forms of communication. (Growing Greatness, 2020). Afterschool Alliance in March 2020 found that 77% of parents agreed that after-school leadership programs have helped develop their children's teamwork skills and gained leadership, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Their study also suggested that 88% of parents believe that these programs have also helped develop their children's social skills. (Afterschool Alliance, 2020).

### **Consequences**

After-school leadership programs teach students how to peacefully advocate for the most passionate issues. They provide a positive influence for students because it gives them confidence and a sense of accomplishment. When at-risk youth are allowed to serve in their community, their voices are heard. After-school programs teach youth the skills they will need to become successful members of their community when they become adults. Youth leadership and advocacy programs can teach students who the important leaders are in their community and how to communicate with them effectively. In a study of YLA programs at "Empowering youth to be engaged in the community has shown to decrease traditional problem behaviors." (Texas School Safety Center, 2017). for youth describes the outcomes Researchers have begun to study the interaction between youth engagement and positive development. Youth engagement is defined as meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, focusing outside of him or herself.

Educational inequalities occur when schools do not provide youth with peer group leadership and advocacy programs in schools. Extracurricular activities like school sports

According to a study by National Center for Educational Statistics, *Extracurricular Participation, and Student Engagement*. “Extracurricular activities provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply academic skills in a real-world context.” (NCES, 1995). The use of technology in the classroom has increased over the last 25 years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools struggled to provide students with adequate internet and digital devices to access school instruction at home. This shined a light on education inequalities involving technology and internet access in communities like Watsonville Ca. In the US Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2020, the percentage of Watsonville residents with internet access was reported to be at 75.4%, and residents with a computer were at 81.5% between 2015-2019. This is less than the national average reported in The National Center for Education Statistics report. During the 2020 school year and through the COVID-19 restrictions placed on schools, on average, 94% of households had access to internet service, and 94% had access to computers during the school year for students in the eighth grade. (NCES Blog, 2021, June). Research on juvenile crime and youth development has shown that during after-school hours crime increases. The consequences of not providing structured leadership programs after school are substance use, delinquent behavior, risky sexual behavior, and possible victimization. (Kremer, K. et al., 2015 ). As demands for after-school programs increase among students from lower-income minority families and communities, substantial barriers have been identified that keep them from participating. Among those identified are cost, available space and safe transportation have prevented low-income families from participating in after-school programs compared to higher-income white families. (Kremer, K. et al., 2015 )

Leadership and health advocacy programs can help prevent the adverse outcomes facing



at-risk youth in low-income minority families in communities like Watsonville and Santa Cruz county. The benefits of attending leadership and health advocacy workshops like Growing Greatness have shown to be beneficial in helping to change the course for negative adult outcomes such as poor health, substance use, and the risk of incarceration for at-risk youth. (Kremer, K. et al., 2015 ).

Another consequence of not providing youth leadership and advocacy workshops for students is the loss of school resources to become active leaders in their community before becoming adults and/or going to college. Communities, schools, and educators across the country have begun to see the effectiveness of giving youth the power to create change by letting their voices be heard. The 2020-21 school year has changed the way students learn. Online instruction has proven for some youth to be an effective, safe way to engage in school-based clubs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In an article by the Center of American Progress, C.A.P., *Remote Learning, and School Reopenings: What Worked and What Didn't*. (C.A.P., 2021).

### **Barriers to Service Delivery**

Lack of funding, loss of revenue, and donations for nonprofits and other social services that after-school service programs are struggling during this pandemic due to closed schools. (Tsega, Giantris, & Shah, 2020).

### **Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Factor 1 Competitive funding for Academic nonprofit after-school programs.	Lack of access to leadership and advocacy (YLA) programs to reach at-risk youth.	Consequence 1 Students become disengaged from school and community causing delinquent behavior

		and increasing dropout rates.
Factor 2 Leadership and health advocacy programs contribute to positive development.		Consequence 2 Loss of school resources to become active leaders in their community before becoming adults and/or going to college
Factor 3 Lack of Stakeholder involvement		Consequence 3 Large Hispanic/Latinx community of underserved youth without a voice for equitable change

### Capstone Project Description and Justification

#### Capstone Project

The project will work alongside Growing Greatness to create the Changemaker Academy. The Changemaker Academy will be a hybrid online program allowing students to participate at home and school when school districts open for in-person and expand after-school instruction.

Growing Greatness has decided to begin using a hybrid learning approach for their afterschool program when they reopen in the fall 2022 school year.

Youth leadership and after-school classes will allow students in the Watsonville community to safely experience and participate in youth leadership and advocacy programs while the after-school programs are closed. In addition, the hybrid program will allow students to work alongside students from other schools who share the same or similar cause while working on their projects. The workshop will be conducted via Zoom using Google Slides, live lectures, and student interactions.

Another consequence of not having youth leadership and health advocacy programs available in Watsonville is leaving a community of underserved youth without a voice for equitable change. Research has shown that a student's voice is important in education because it allows youth to see what they care about is then heard by teachers, administrators, and community members and then respond to it in a way that can change their lives forever. This kind of learning can prepare youth for growth as employed adults. (Family Supports Student Voice., n.d.).

### **Project Purpose**

Growing Greatness has provided leadership training opportunities for students and educators with their after-school programs for several years. Unfortunately, with schools throughout the country closed due to the Covid pandemic, there has been a decrease in opportunities during the previous 12 months. The elimination of afterschool programs and peer advocacy groups has left students without an outlet or voice to make healthy changes in their community. The Changemaker Academy will be a hybrid online program allowing students to attend the workshop online and on-campus when it is allowed again.

### **Project Justification**

The justification for this project is to provide this agency, Growing Greatness with the ability to have a curriculum ready to use for their Changemaker Academy. The Changemaker Academy will provide youth in Watsonville, Ca. the opportunity to participate in school-based extracurricular programs that will continue to keep youth engaged in their community. This will help eliminate the consequences of students becoming disengaged from school and their community, causing delinquent behavior and increasing dropout rates. The Growing Greatness

curriculum will also encourage students to address the stakeholders in the community to become involved in the education of their future employees and community members.

### **Project Implementation**

As of November 2021, Growing Greatness is not currently onboard with the Pajaro Valley School District during the 2021-2022 school year. However, some after-school programs have been approved with continued covid restrictions. The Extended Learning After School Programs (ASP) is funded from various state and federal grants. ( PVUSD. 2021).

A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation was created using Growing Greatness's 137 pages "Do Kit" curriculum workbook. Once it is online and operational, the Changemaker Academy will provide chapter presentations from this master presentation. This will provide Growing Greatness the much-needed tool for developing their presentation to have available for instructors, school educators, and students. The workshop will be conducted via Zoom while using PowerPoints, Google Slides, live lectures, and student interactions.

Growing Greatness will provide each student and educator with their own DO Kit workbook free of charge when funding is available.

A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

### **Assessment Plan**

An assessment survey will be conducted to determine the usefulness of PowerPoint presentations while taking courses online. This survey will measure each participants' experience with attending classes online or in-person when powerpoints are part of the regular curriculum. It will also assess the participants' overall opinion as graduate students from a Collaborate Health and Human Services program, how likely they believe the use of PowerPoint presentations of course materials helps to improve learning outcomes.

## **Expected Outcomes**

The expected outcomes are that the student surveys will show the use of PowerPoints while students have improved their overall learning of subjects. In addition, they have Changemaker Academy online. Using technologies like Zoom, powerpoints, and breakout rooms will allow youth to become more engaged with their school academics and their community's health and overall well-being. Also, having the Changemaker Academy online will give each enrolled student unbiased access to information and will allow them to develop a deeper understanding of the world and community where they live.

## **Project Results**

Growing Greatness is not currently onboard with the Pajaro Valley School District during the current 2021-2022 school year. However, a few extra-curricular after-school programs, including school sports, have been approved and are still following covid restrictions. Some of these programs are daycare-type programs where students can get help with homework while waiting for parents to pick them up after work and were in place before schools closed during the spring 2020 semester. (PVUSD., 2021).

The capstone results are from the Changemaker Academy google survey that was sent out in November 2021. The survey was sent to a select group of 46 CSUMB CHHS Graduate students and three Instructors. Of the 46 recipients, 21 responded. The survey had a total of 10 questions. Question 1). PowerPoints allow me to listen to lectures and not spend a lot of time taking notes. 2). I have noticed that PowerPoints help my instructors stay on track during lectures. 3). I use my class PowerPoints as a tool to complete my assignments. 4). Most of my CSUMB instructors use PowerPoints. 5). Powerpoints are valuable tools for both online and in-person courses. 6). Powerpoints during lectures have allowed me to organize my notes. 7). PowerPoints have had a positive outcome on my ability to learn course content. 8). Powerpoint

use in education has increased during the pandemic. 9). Powerpoints allow instructors to cover more material during lectures. 10). Powerpoints are an academically accepted platform for teaching various subjects to students of all ages and backgrounds. Answers were given using a Linear scale of 1-5 where 1-strongly disagree, 2-somewhat disagree, 3-agree, 4-somewhat agree, and 5-strongly agree.

### CHHS Student Google Survey Graph

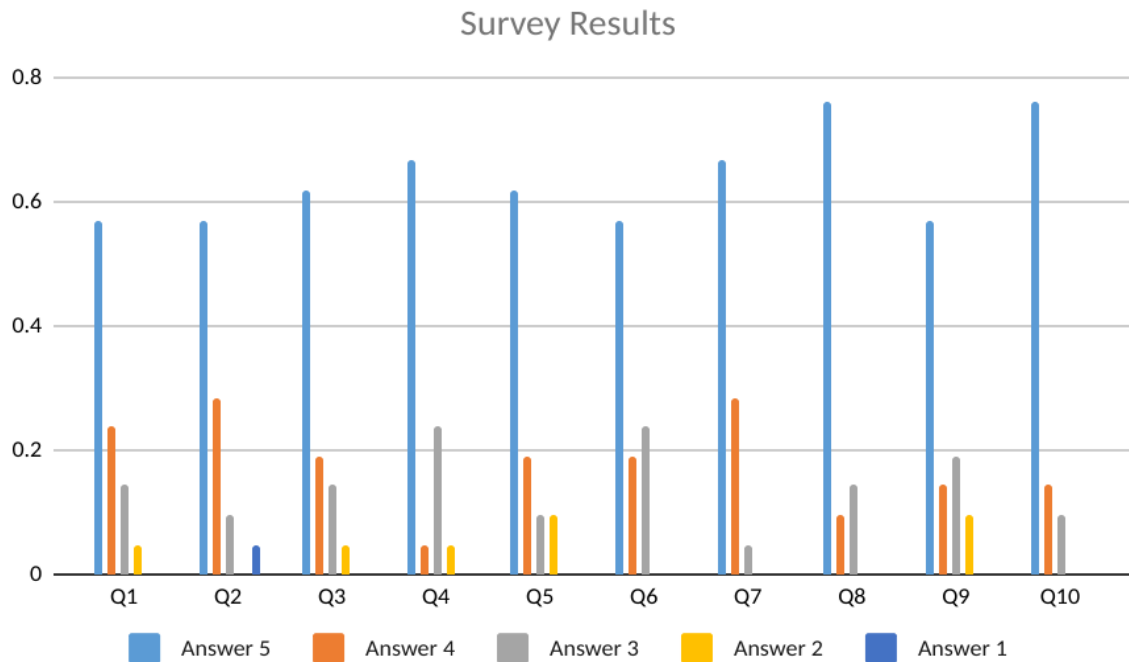


Figure 1: CHHS Student Google Survey Graph. The Y-axis represents the number of students.

1-21. The X-axis represents questions numbered 1-5.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The research shows a need to have a leadership and health advocacy program for the youth in Watsonville, Ca. An online and in-person workshop would benefit students during these uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The hybrid workshop would also allow students to meet youth from around the county and throughout the state who share the same interest in serving their community. I recommend Growing Greatness to continue its internship program with California State University Monterey Bay in the spring 2022 semester. It is also recommended to have two interns in their next session to get The Changemaker Academy online and in schools. Interns could accomplish this by having the student interns propose a study group of students to participate in a short session and then conduct surveys from teachers, parents, and students to determine how to improve the classes. At the beginning of the 2020 school year, I should have been done regardless of the pandemic. If it had, the Changemaker Academy would still be online today. My recommendation to this agency and future interns is not to delay implementing the youth leadership program any longer.

### **Personal Reflection**

Personal/professional growth: I chose this agency to have the opportunity to work with underserved youth and help them grow as successful students. I didn't realize the many layers of work that were involved in doing that. Although the pandemic created a barrier to funding and

lack of access to in-person learning, the agency still could have been made if it had an online program in place. This project turned out more challenging to do on my own without the agency's help and access to students.

Strengths/successes: The most significant strength of this project is the Do Kit curriculum written by my mentor Kymberly Lacrosse. Any success from this project, the presentations are a direct result of her work and dedication to teaching the youth of Watsonville the much-needed leadership and advocacy skills they need to grow.

Limitations/challenges: As discussed before, the regulations created by the pandemic and the social distancing restrictions made in-person learning unavailable for over a year. The challenge was to keep the mission and vision of Growing Greatness intact while developing the hybrid online Changemaker Academy.

Broader social significance: Underserved communities like Watsonville, Ca. face additional barriers while attending school because they may not have the economic and social resources that other non-minority students have. This leaves them at a disadvantage starting at a young age and continues throughout life if programs like Growing Greatness don't intervene. An online and in-person hybrid workshop like the Changemaker Academy can help reach more youth in underserved communities.

In the future, I would suggest that new student interns start working on getting groups of youth into workshops. Also, get the community involved by going out to large corporations and businesses in Watsonville to share Growing Greatness's motive and mission statement. These



stakeholders can become valuable resources to help keep this much-needed program alive and growing in this much-deserved community.

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**Appendix A**

**Scope of Work**

**The Changemaker Academy**

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
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S4 Fall 2020 CHHS 396 S4 Spr. 2021 CHHS 496A	Turn in on Canvas	Sept/2020 Feb/2021	K. Lacrosse
Weekly meetings with mentor	Google meets, facetime, text, Phone calls	Wednesday 1-2 pm	K. Lacrosse
Agency Onboarding	Complete agency research	Sept/2020	K. Lacrosse
Grant funding research activities	Sample grant proposal in CHHS 445	Spring/21 Semester	K. Lacrosse A.Albessiane
Researched alternatives for COVID-19 in-person learning restrictions	Meet with Mentor Share Capstone project ideas	Sept/2021	K. Lacrosse

Research sources for Capstone paper	Capstone Agency Powerpoint	Aug-Dec 2021	K. Lacrosse
Work on writing capstone	Archive paper	Dec/10/21	K. Lacrosse
Write google survey questions ten total	Send out survey questions-50 invitations	Nov/01/2021	K. Lacrosse
Create a list of Presentations	Leadership PowerPoint	Two weeks-Oct/2021	K. Lacrosse
Download Do Kit to PDF	Do Kit PowerPoint Presentation	Two weeks-Nov/2021	K. Lacrosse

Final S4 Fall 2021 CHHS 496B	Student Summative Evaluation	Dec/10/21 Final time log	K.Lacrosse
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