

5-2022

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**Watsonville Police Activities League: Raising Awareness of Drugs Disguised as
Candy Parental Workshop**

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May 4, 2022

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Abstract

Watsonville Police Activities League (PAL) is a nonprofit agency that collaborates with the Watsonville Police Department to guide youth and actively build positive relationships in the Watsonville community. This project aimed to help PAL address the drug use and abuse among Watsonville youth through workshops that raise awareness of the growing problem and the importance of not falling under any substances. Parent-child involvement, family drug history, and negative peer relationships contribute to drug use, making parents the focus of the workshops. The intent was to address the negative consequences of drug use, such as poor mental health, low academic achievement, and poor quality of life. The result reached the expected outcome of a 100% effectiveness rating and raised awareness on how drugs can be disguised as candy.

Keywords: drug use/abuse, PAL, youth, Candy

Agency and Communities Served

Watsonville Police Activities League is a non profit organization & youth development program that is funded by grants and donations. Watsonville PAL has two locations, and works directly with the local police department which offers the youth opportunities in order to build good bonds and become a positive influence in the community. “We, as police officers, know that we must do everything we can to get to children before they get involved with drugs or gangs.” (PAL, 2021). Another youth developmental program that partners with PAL is FLYERS, and has their own location. Through these programs youth get to focus on their academics and get help if needed by team members, and are offered other ways of participating in order to develop personal & professional growth. PAL and FLYERS are both youth development programs run by the city of Watsonville Parks and Community Services Department. The community who are getting served directly are elementary, middle school, and high school students, depending on the program/location that determines the age for participants.

PAL offers involvement through recreational activities which include: soccer, dancing, art, team building, and other character developing activities. Youth are provided with the opportunity to be included in field trips where they are taken on local hikes & parks in the Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Summer field trips are also an option for attendee’s and have the opportunity to go to different locations. This past summer they had the chance to go to Alcatraz island to visit the federal penitentiary and learn about the history and gain knowledge.

Problem Description

There has been a high percentage of drug abuse/use among youth in the City of Watsonville, making it difficult for students to fully engage and focus in their education and be positive members of the community. According to Elevate Addiction Services, “About 40 percent of Santa Cruz County students report using marijuana, inhalants, or prescription drugs in the past year.” (Elevate Addiction Services, 2022). The contributing factors to this problem description can be negative peer relationships,

family drug history, and little to no parental involvement. This can include parents not being involved with educational purposes of the student, language barriers, or no communication with their children. NDSU talks about parent involvement, “Youth are less likely to use addictive substances if their parents talk early and often about the risks, establish clear rules and consequences, and regularly monitor their activities.” (NDSU, 2019). It is important in a positive parent and child relationship to be able to have good communication in order to prevent any type of drug consumption.

Contributing Factors

Parent Child Involvement

Establishing a conversation regarding drugs with children can be challenging, but it is important for this topic to be discussed. Parent involvement has a high impact and can determine the usage of drugs, once their children evolve to young adolescents. This conversation can divert in different ways, but constant communication can avoid negative behavior. According to ADAPT, “Getting involved in your child’s life because teens are less likely to get involved with drugs when a caring adult is a part of their life.” (ADAPT, 2022). The positive relationships between parents and children will lead children to make wise decisions.

Family Drug History

The reason youth start developing negative habits is often due to their family drug history. The environment they are surrounded by affects them in a positive or negative way. Unfortunately, when a child grows up around family members who consume drugs, they are more likely to develop those habits. Worse to say, drugs are seen as normalized and it makes it more accessible for youth. Middle Earth mentions, “If alcohol or drug addiction runs in your family, experts suggest talking to your children about it no later than the pre-teen or early teen years. The fact that your child has a greater risk for developing a

substance abuse problem is serious and should be discussed before they discover these substances on their own.” (Middle Earth, 2022).

Negative Peer Relationships

One of the biggest contributing factors are negative peer relationships. Many youth try to fit in among their peers, who use drugs and fall under peer pressure. NIH mentions, “Peers are often highly influential in convincing one another to try alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs for the first time.” (NIH, 2014). This often occurs in order to leave an impression on their friends to look “cool”. Negative relationships, between peers, often lead students to consume drugs.

Consequences

Poor Academic Achievement

The academic performance for the youth gets influenced in a negative manner and disrupts their focus. Drug utilization creates a lack of concentration within students and impedes their fulfillment in academic achievement. “Drug abuse among teens and college students has a detrimental effect on academic performance. Young people are more susceptible to the short- and long-term cognitive effects of drug abuse while the social and emotional repercussions further increase risk factors for problems in school.” (Recovery First, 2022). The insufficient focus deprives their ability to expand and succeed through their personal and professional growth.

Mental Health Issues

The outcome to drug consumption can also evolve to mental health issues. For instance, most people experience anxiety and depression. This deprives children and youth from performing successfully in their personal goals. “Substance abusing youth are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems, including depression, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and suicide.” (Consequences of Youth Substance Abuse, 1998). Ultimately, mental health issues

will create conflict, within family, friends, and the individual. As a consequence, people become distant from the individual, because other side effects are present. It escalates as far as others being concerned of their well being, because they are unsure of what mental state they are in.

Poor Quality Of Life

There has been a correlation between drug abuse and a poor quality of life. Drug use has many impacts on youth and can impact an individual's life in micro, mezzo, and macro aspects that will lead to negative consequences. “Although most youth are in good health, some youth are at an increased risk for behaviors that can lead to poor health outcomes, such as high risk substance abuse.” (CDC, 2020). Drug use/abuse can lead to addiction, which has many faces and the consequences for drug consumption can destroy a person's life such as having financial burden, no family support, unemployment and overall poor health. The CDC also mentions, “Youth with substance use disorders also experience higher rates of physical and mental illness, diminished overall health and well-being, and potential progression to addiction.” (CDC, 2020).

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parental Child Communication (Involvement) ● Family Drug History ● Negative Peer Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High Percentage of Drug Use/Abuse Among Youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poor Academic Achievement ● Mental Health Issues ● Poor Quality of Life

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Project Description

Weekly bilingual workshops (2) Parent involvement (Talking to kids/parents about drugs, positive relationships, drug prevention/intervention program). This project will be based on educating purposes on drug prevention, types of drugs that youth might not know and/or parents. Such as (ex.) cannabis infused candy, gum, chips, etc and educating them on those topics and incorporating the importance of parental involvement. Parents might not know the new types of ways drugs might be consumed so this weekly workshop will be for educational purposes and will be provided in English and Spanish for the hispanic/latino community.

Project Justification

By raising awareness on prevention for drug use/abuse parents can be able to be more involved in their child's lives and prevent them from negative actions and ultimately cause them negative consequences. It can be that parents are not involved or have no knowledge on the new ways of consumption due to new ways that are evolving to target consumers in different ways. This will improve youth's lives by having them focus on what really needs to be their focus, academics and positive involvement. A parent workshop was the best method due to youth being very distracted, not being able to fully focus and because they are not fully developed in order to understand certain aspects of this information. Parents are more likely to understand and grasp this information and the importance of the consequences of it.

Project Implementation

The plan of the project was to be implemented through two bilingual workshop presentations specifically targeting the parents of the attendees in this agency and its collaborating programs. The first step/s was to gather ideas with my mentor, and develop a plan to create the workshop and get approval after completion.

The process was important to me to gain knowledge on the intended targeted audience. We decided it would be the parents of the attendees, because it would be easier for them to understand the main point we wanted to come across. Originally I was placed in one of the three locations of this agency with different age groups (middle school and high school). This semester I was placed at a different location which had elementary students and a higher number of attendees.

We thought it would be more effective to have a bilingual workshop on educating parents because they would have a better understanding of this information. The workshop included consequences, contributing factors, signs, solutions and collaborative programs that can help with drug prevention & how drugs can be disguised as candy or their children's favorite snack. After creating the slides, they would be sent to my mentor for any feedback/recommendations and to finalize details of the presentation for the workshops. Once approved, dates were set, zoom link meetings, and fliers were created in order to be distributed to parents. Once parents attended the workshop, at the end a link was included in order for them to fill out a survey regarding the effectiveness and what could be done to improve. This survey was provided in English and Spanish for parents in order for them to fill out and have an understanding of the questions. Information was collected after every workshop.

Assessment Plan

This workshop targets the parents of the student members of the Watsonville PAL program. The focus is to bring awareness of methods of drug use/abuse among the youth & increase parental

involvement in a positive manner. To measure the attendance of the workshop/s, parents will have the option to indicate that they are attending at the beginning of every workshop and will be able to engage throughout the presentation. Data will also be collected through survey/s at the end of every workshop to measure the effectiveness. Since there is more than one workshop, my mentor and I will compare the numbers from both dates and expect to see an increase by the second workshop. The workshop will be promoted through a flier providing the workshop's information & details. It will be printed out in English & Spanish and passed out to parent's attendees once they get picked up.

Expected Outcomes

The purpose of this project is to raise awareness among attendee's parents in order for them to see the importance of being more involved and to prevent any type of drug use/abuse. The outcome of this project is to educate parents on drug use/abuse which include consequences, contributing factors, ways of consumption, common signs and solutions. It is important to show that by raising awareness through this project, parents can gain knowledge and implement different forms of prevention for their kids. The idea is for more than half of the parents to find the information from the workshop useful & effective to their advantage.

Project Results

The results of the workshop/s exceeded my expectations, and were successful. Parents attended the workshop and were involved with icebreakers, and were able to learn about the information in English and Spanish. They also were provided a bilingual survey towards the end of every workshop to measure the effectiveness and collect results. During the ice breakers, parents were able to answer questions such as "Have you taken the time to talk to your children about drugs and drug consumption?" which 2 shared their reasons for doing so and their

experiences.

During the first workshop there were 6 participants, and all of them answered “yes” on the question “Was this workshop effective?” They were also provided with another question: “Did this workshop help you gain knowledge on drug prevention?” to which every participant also answered “yes.” There was an increase of participants for the second workshop by one more parent. Overall, the combination of both workshops consisted of thirteen participants in total.

The results in effectiveness turned out to be 92.3 % making the workshop/s a success. Something that surprised me during the workshops was how parents were not aware of the new ways drugs are being consumed. For example, parents were not informed that there are cannabis infused candies, cheetos, cookies and other snacks that youth are attracted to. At the end, a parent appreciated the information provided at the workshop because it helped her become aware of the new ways on drug consumption and post effects that are presented. Areas of improvement consist of adding more examples on enhanced drugs such as vaping tools, that will benefit the parents on gaining information they can provide to their children. This will help the youth by raising awareness and help them understand other forms of drug consumption and negative consequences they consist of.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion, the results have shown the effectiveness of the project and demonstrates the issues needing to be addressed and has an impact on the youth in our community. This shows the importance of the workshop/s and the amount of work needed to do in order to be successful. This helps parents to build stronger communication & involvement with their children to avoid any type of drug use involvement and be able to create a positive bond that will benefit both the youth and parents.

Following, recommendations that the agency should provide are more workshops for parents and the youth attendees to provide information and teach them the importance of drug prevention. Workshops can be once a month, or twice making one for parents and the youth in the agency. Also something that can be helpful would be staff members being more aware of these issues since there are youth from different ages. This would demonstrate how the agency is trying to be involved with the youth and the mission they have.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Weekly workshops (Parental Involvement, Drug use/abuse)	Jorge Rubio			
Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials, Service Needed	Completed Product
Discuss Capstone ideas with mentor	February 18	Student/mentor	Computer	2/18
Brainstorm on dates with mentor	February 25	Student/mentor	Computer	2/18
Create a flier to promote the workshops	March 11	Student/mentor	Computer	3/28
Create the presentation (bilingual) & send to mentor for approval	March 18	Student/mentor	Computer, powerpoint	3/28
Create zoom link/s for workshop participants & add to flier	March 18	Student	Computer, zoom	3/28
Conduct first workshop (bilingual)	April 20	Student	zoom	4/20
Conduct second workshop (bilingual)	April 27	student	zoom	4/27
Collect and evaluate data	April 27	Student/mentor	survey, computer	4/27

