

12-2022

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Power of Arts & Craft to Support Children with Illnesses

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2022

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Abstract

Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services is a non profit agency in Watsonville, California. Providing family-centered care for children and their families in their emotional, practical, and financial struggles. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there's a need for a laser-focused strategy to meet the immediate needs of children's health. Childhood cancer greatly affects their upbringing and may create worse problems throughout their adulthood. Without assistance, these families are critically vulnerable to their physical and mental health issues. This project allows children with illness alongside their families to receive mental health assistance throughout their complex journey. With the beauty of art therapy, children express their internal thoughts while engaging with the activities. Providing an opportunity to improve and nourish their skills during difficult situations. Empowering children to use their creativity and free selves in a moment of hope. Hope and healing, until there is a cure for cancer.

Keywords: Children, Cancer, Mental Health

Agency & Communities Served

Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services exists to improve the quality of life for children with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses by supporting their families in the challenges they face. Jacob's Hearts provides family-centered care that addresses the emotional, practical and financial struggles for families of children and teens during treatment, families experiencing anticipatory grief and those who are bereaved. Since 1998, Jacob's Heart has provided emotional, practical, financial and peer support to hundreds of local children with cancer and thousands of their family members. The vision is for communities where every child with a serious or life-threatening condition has a strong, supported and informed family empowered to fully participate in their care. They strive to inspire compassionate action within local communities to create a safety net of support for the unique needs of each child and family.

Jacob's Heart provides services in alignment with humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. Maslow's theory asserts that a human's needs exist in an order of significance, and that basic needs must be met before the individual can give their attention to the higher needs (Cherry, 2022). Programs address the basic needs for families of children with cancer, while building toward hope and healing, even when there is no cure. Supporting parents of seriously-ill children by addressing their practical needs is transformative: it relieves a significant source of outside stress, and it allows families to focus their time and resources on their child's treatment and on the well-being of the siblings.

Main services include direct financial assistance to help these low-income families caring for an ill child, weekly grocery deliveries right at their doorstep, and transportation from families homes to children's hospitals in Palo Alto and San Francisco.

Communities served consist of Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito, and South Santa Clara counties. The majority of Jacob's Heart children come from low-income backgrounds with high levels of unmet needs. Jacob's Heart 2019 census asserts that 79% of their families are enrolled in Medi-Cal, indicating low-income status. Genders of these children are almost identical with 49% being of male gender, and 51% being of female gender. The leading ethnicity of Jacob's Heart children come from Hispanic/Latino families with the percentage of 76%, Caucasion being 17% and Others with 8%.

Problem Description

A cancer diagnosis is upsetting at any stage in an individual's life, however it is particularly mournful when the cancer patient is a child. In 2021, there were an estimated 10,500 new cases of cancer diagnosed among children from birth to 14 years, and about 1,190 children expected to die from the disease (National Cancer Institute, 2021). Cancer remains as the main source of deaths from diseases among children. Children with cancer and their siblings need a strong network of support that engenders confidence and resilience in the face of one of life's greatest challenges: childhood illness and death, especially in the midst of a global pandemic. The majority of these children are already at high risk, medically and socioeconomically. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 37% of families in Monterey County were classified as experiencing housing insecurities, 45% are high financial need and lack reliable services, creating significant issues of quality of life for the seriously ill children (Jacob's Heart Case Statement, 2021). Problems are worsening by the day, decreasing overall survival rates and on-going stressors. Plans of actions are needed to create strategic methods for the increase of physical and psychological health.

Contributing Factors

The majority of Jacob's Heart children come from Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. These counties are heavily populated with low income families. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there's a need for a laser-focused strategy to meet the immediate needs of seriously ill children and their families in these areas. Research by the National Cancer Institute (2018), determined that people in low and middle income counties in the United States are more likely to die of cancer than those who live in high income counties. Low income counties do not have the adequate care, which increases their chances of contracting diseases throughout their lifetime. Aside from Jacob's Heart, there's only one other nonprofit agency that works with childhood cancer in these counties, which demonstrates the lack of health services and the high demand of resources.

When a child is diagnosed with cancer, family members are also emotionally impacted by the disease. Their lifestyles drastically change as they need to fully commit to the treatments that may last for years to come. Lewandowska (2021) asserts that, It deprives them of the feeling of security; introduces uncertainty, fear and anxiety; and destabilizes their life. The family will have to become very active since they need to accommodate the visits to health clinics, hospitals, and the appointments for their child. With their daily life and work responsibilities, it creates tremendous hardships all combined. Families are troubled with thoughts, duration of the sickness, and the long battle their own children will have to go through.

As if their physical and emotional health wasn't enough, the financial burden of the cost of treatment comes into play. In a moment where the family should be focusing on their child and dealing with their own health, they are confronted with devastating bills. The average cost of

a stay in a hospital for a child with cancer is a staggering \$40,000 per stay (Frazier, 2017). Many families may have health insurance that may cover most of the expense, but this is only a part of the finance needed. A significant issue is when parents have to leave their current job site and find employment elsewhere to take care of their child. Employment will be hard to find as accepting an employee who can only cover part-time roles can be an issue for the site. Forcing financial instability to these families and often obligating a parent to stay home.

Consequences

Impacts consist of short-term and long-term consequences of childhood cancer. Human bodies aren't fully developed until they reach their early adulthood years, hormonal changes, and overall growth. Many children will have issues with learning difficulties, growth delays, and developmental problems that can result from years of treatment procedures. Their small bodies cannot handle these hard treatments, resulting in consequential lifestyles. According to Erker et al. (2018), children with cancer can experience decreased physical, emotional, and social health related quality of life compared to healthy children. If children with cancer do not receive the appropriate care, problems may arise from their ability to properly adjust to society and their daily lifestyles.

On the financial side, children's cancer treatment takes an extreme financial toll on families. Studies show that about one-quarter of families of children being treated for cancer lost more than 40% of their total household income, while one-third experienced housing, energy or food insecurity (Mastroianni, 2015). Without proper health services for these families and

without the proper help from social workers and financial counseling, they will not financially survive this journey. These financial setbacks only worsen if a plan of action is not created.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Lack of health services in low income areas	The lack of resources for children with cancer and their family.	Impact of childhood cancer throughout their lifetime
Emotional and psychological impact to the family		Financial toll on families
Financial worries		

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

The Arts & Crafts day was an event for my agency, Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services. Our in treatment children and bereaved children alongside their families were all invited. This event supported my capstone project with raising awareness to this population's crucial cry for their mental health. Showcasing how the use of art is a great form of creative expression integrated as a mental health service. Art therapy benefits this population with having a day to fulfill those needs of treatment intended to heal their health. Exploring their creativity through art and healing throughout the process.

A challenge faced in this capstone project is finding the right date for the event. The Jacob's Heart agency has a tight schedule as there's several events throughout the year. Jacob's Heart staff kept updates when the day of the event took place.

Project Purpose

Lewandowska (2021) asserts that a child's cancer affects their entire family and is a source of chronic stress for a sick child, as well as for their parents and siblings. The arts and crafts day event will be created to help Jacob's Heart children and their family members with their mental health. A day in which they will celebrate each other's company while they work on art projects to fulfill their joy in a crucial time of their lives.

A specific art technique that will be emphasized is the dreamcatcher. A handmade willow hoop, on which its purpose is to provide a safe environment and create positive energy. These can be hung in the children's rooms and provide hopeful spirits.

Project Justification

The utilization of art therapy is a common tool that is known to be an effective way of treating mental health issues, especially in children. Art therapy is a technique rooted in the idea that creative expression can foster healing and mental well being (Van Lith, 2015). These children often shy away from communication and express themselves through their drawings and other art activities. A study in the efficacy of art therapy in childhood cancer patients discusses findings that suggest children who participate in various forms of drawing interventions exhibited enhanced communication with family members and healthcare providers (Aguilar, 2017). Creating art therapy as an adaptation of utilizing the use of these techniques as a healing strategy.

Project Implementation

Project implementation consists of assessing the plan for my capstone project. This allowed us to understand the focus of the event, everyone's roles, expected timeline, and make sure that we all understand the criteria. As for executing the plan, we had regular meetings and discussions about our progress leading up to the event. This included scheduling the event, and monitoring the resources to ensure that everything is gathered to have a smooth event. During implementation, changes were made as needed. More further information about the project implementation and timeline is shown in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

Assessment Plan

To measure the effectiveness, data was analyzed from asking participant families about the impact from the day of the event. Using an online software to create the questions and rating scales that were sent, either digitally or by mail. Throughout receiving feedback from the families, the information was gathered to assess the effectiveness of the event.

Expected Outcomes

This project raised awareness not only for these families and children, but for our communities as well. I believe there's a critical need for education on this subject, especially for minority families. Jacob's Heart works with the majority of this population, in which this project highlights the importance of their mental health. The lack of awareness of mental health issues can take a toll on a person, and it's a big part of my capstone project to discuss about the artistic

way of changing those behaviors. I measured the impact of the project by understanding the target audience, and what the event creates in their lifestyle.

Preparation for Consultation

This month, I kept in touch with my mentor on the specific date for the event. I was hoping the date would be cleared soon, in order to have everything situated. I also needed to schedule my weeks so I was able to focus more on my capstone project. The challenge as I previously mentioned, was looking for the official date for my event at Jacob's Heart. I don't have any issues with my field placement, every staff member has been very welcoming since the day I started.

We were able to have an expected date and made the event come to life. With great communication skills, we were able to provide a successful event. It was a smaller gathering of what I was hoping for but this allowed us to focus on each child independently. Which created the event more intimate and allowed each child to feel comfortable with our presence.

Project Results

The expected project was for several children alongside their families to have a special day. A day in which they focused on their mental health with the use of art therapy.

Unfortunately, the event had to be moved to a later date which created setbacks for the scheduled project. These changes created issues in which things needed to be rushed, however the goal remained the same. We expected to have around eight to ten children in the event, but fell short with only half. In the event, children were able to create their own dreamcatchers while they listened to calming tunes in the background. With the grateful help of my mentor and volunteers, it was a great day for art activities. It achieved the expected outcome as these children's health were the key importance and provided an evening solely for them.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The key learning experiences from my project's results are the importance of planning and scheduling. These terms are crucial in having a successful project because of the issues it can bring when information is not clear. Learning how to manage obstacles effectively when working on an event is an adjustment learned in the process. In which challenges how I react to the problems and how to overcome them. Overall, it was a challenging project to create but there's learning experiences to take from this event. As for recommendations to the agency, there's an opportunity in understanding how to view results of an event. The agency can create ways to provide evidence in statistics if the event worked efficiently or not. I wasn't able to create a clear table or chart to understand the clear positives and negatives of the event. I hope there's a better way of creating effective strategies towards future events.

Personal Reflection

What I learned about the issue is the immense help needed for these families. There's rising cases of childhood cancer and it isn't stopping any time soon. What we can do is try to decrease the hardships of the process. Providing services and events for these children can definitely help them in their journey. In these ways, children and their families can find joy and have a break from dealing with their tough treatments and daily lifestyles.

The planning and implementation of the project was tough to execute. With the agency having a tough work schedule throughout the year, my event had to be postponed for a later date. Fortunately, it was officially rescheduled and thanks to my mentor's I was back on track. My mentor helped with confirming how many families and children were going to be at the event and it was executed. The contribution for the agency was to find a meaningful way in which this project was therapeutic for the children. In which allowed a purpose in creating these activities and aligning it with my art's project.

The main success in my project was the happiness from the children when creating these art pieces. It was a magical moment seeing it first hand and a very proud moment for myself. The strength of an art piece we worked on was the dreamcatcher we made. The purpose of a dreamcatcher is for children's bad dreams to be caught by the dreamcatcher and let the good dreams come in. Creating a symbol of hope and bringing positive energy into their homes. At the end of the event, children were excited to get home and hang up their work of art.

The challenge faced was having a clear number of participants for the event. After rescheduling the event, there was an uncertainty of how many children will be attending. Having enough materials and items were in question. Luckily, there was more than enough for these children to use in their art activities. We also had extra art supplies as a backup if there was a shortage. We ended up with a small number of children at the event, which created an intimate gathering. This allowed us to focus with each child individually and allowed them to open themselves up.

Poor mental health is the health issue that the project relates to. The power of arts and crafts project addressed poor mental health with the use of art therapy. These activities are meant to be relaxing and for children to use their pure creativity in the process.

What needs to be addressed for children's mental health is to raise as much awareness as possible for this population. Childhood cancer is a saddening health issue for these innocent angels. Until there is a cure for cancer, there's a crucial amount of help needed. Whether it's providing services for these families like Jacob's Heart, up to raising funds for these children's costly medical treatment. There's various ways in which help can be provided for children with cancer.

Some advice for future capstone students is the importance of planning. The sooner you start with brainstorming about your capstone project, the less issue you'll have to face throughout the semester. Having everything situated and clear communications with the agency members goes a long way. Take your time with the process and enjoy each step leading to the day of the event. Cherish every moment with your peers and agency as the months go by quickly. There will be challenges throughout the process, but that's totally normal. Keep moving forward

and trust your instincts. Best wishes to your capstone project and most importantly, have fun while doing it.

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Appendix A**Scope of Work**

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Art supplies, tables, chairs, food, food supplies	Software, mobile applications, contracts, expense reports	Implemented in Fall 2022	Jacob's Hearts employees, volunteers