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Destressing through Recreation

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Author Note

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Abstract

Watsonville Parks and Community Services is a youth center where students can go after school and do homework or participate in activities the youth center has for them. Teenagers experience stressful situations at home, school or just life in general. Adults don't seem to pay much attention to what is going around them, which leads youth to do things they are not supposed to do. The project purpose is for the youth to learn how to better cope with the stress levels they might be dealing with in life. The expected outcome is for the youth to learn to express themselves in ways other than lashing out in violence and learn how to cope with stress in a more relaxing way for them. The most important findings were that most of these kids were not stressed, because most of them mentioned they didn't have plans after high school or that they didn't want to go to college. The next step for the agency to do is inform the youth of the positive outcome in doing well in school, even if the youth don't have plans in going to college and show them the benefits if they do end up going to college. Most of these children are the first generation of their family in the United States, and the agency can help them be more successful by guiding them.

Keywords: After school program, stress, youth mental health

Agency & Communities Served

Watsonville Parks and Community Services is located in Watsonville California. At the youth center their mission is to get kids to come and join the youth center where they provide students the opportunity to do their school work, do activities, watch movies, cook, and have free time (G. Bragado, personal communication, September 6, 2023). This is a program that allows kids that are from middle school to high school to come whenever they please. The purpose of this program is to keep these kids away from trouble. This program tries to implement activities so these kids that come can come and have something that keeps them away from trouble.

The community that the agency serves is Watsonville, which is a small community with a population of 51,687 people (Watsonville, 2023). The majority of the people that live in Watsonville are hispanic and white (Watsonville, 2023). The people that are registered for this program are people that live within the community only. The youth that come to this program are low income students to middle class students. Parents register their children to have a safe place where they can hang out. In the meanwhile while they get home. They also bring their children to do homework and play different games that the agency provides for them to have fun, while they come to the youth center. Some of the children that come to the youth center don't have a place to go after school ends or they don't want to go home, so they can come in and hang out with their peers.

The youth center is an after school program for all the middle and high school students. There is a variety of students from different schools within walking distance. Some of these students do walk a good amount of distance just to come to the program. The agency also does events to bring parents and children together. They try to implement having a better bond with

their parents due to many children having a lack of relationship with their parents (G. Bragado, personal communication, September 6, 2023).

<div style="text-align: center;">**Problem Model Background and Literature Review**</div>

Problem Statement

The youth population in middle school and high school do not have healthy coping mechanisms. The youth don't know how to communicate or to problem solve. The students think avoiding the problem and solving things with violence and anger is the solution. The youth have also been observed avoiding an issue and walking away from problems that might be going on inside their homes or their personal lives.

Childhood difficulties or poor parenting methods might have an effect on one's ability to cope with challenges later in life. Furthermore, poor coping abilities can lead to mental diseases, self-harm, and suicidal conduct (McLafferty, 2019). Most of the children at the youth center have had a rough beginning and are in need of help finding a solution and guidance to have a new start. The youth center is helping families come together for the holidays or events to help them bond and learn new ways to better themselves, because most of the youth after high school don't plan to go to college.

An article in the American Academy states that,

Some teenagers experience stress overload. This can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, hostility, physical illness, or ineffective coping mechanisms such as drug and or alcohol usage. When we believe a situation to be unpleasant or painful, our thoughts and bodies undergo modifications that prepare us to respond to danger. (2019)

With this being said a lot of the youth aren't prepared for the outside world and the youth center tries to help students prepare to deal with any type of issue they might have. The people at the

youth center create a bond with students that help the youth guide them to making better choices in life and help them think about better solutions to fix their problems.

Contributing Factors

Minimal Family Support

Yu, et al. states, "...family support among different sources of social support had the greatest impact on adolescents' life satisfaction" (2022). Having family support and other sources where the kids can rely on is really important because they need to have a support system where they feel that if they need anything or they come accorse a problem someone is there to help and hear them out to give them advice.

Another reason why youths tend to have behavior issues is because their parents are always working or their single parent or parents are working multiple jobs and don't have enough time to surprise their children or bond with them. Wow Parenting explains that,

Children in families where both parents work and are unable to spend meaningful time with them frequently lack the required support and supervision. It will demoralize them over time and have a negative impact on their academic achievement. Without parental supervision, youngsters are more prone to develop undesirable habits as a result of peer pressure, such as addiction to games like PUBG, smoking, or even drug use. There is an unsettling trend of less and less close conversation between children and other family members, and many children feel lonely even at home. (2023)

Unstable Home Lives

A young person's level of engagement in health risk behaviors can be influenced by a variety of familial risk factors. Some variables will be ingrained in a young person's life and cannot be changed. These include low birth weight, premature birth, and siblings separated by

less than two years. Family size, "difficult" temperament, and early childhood circumstances such as starvation, poverty, and parenting style (Understanding Families, n.d.). Youth have traumas even before they are born which affects them even before they are born.

The children also have to deal with sibling bullying. A lot of people don't realize that this happens more often than people realize. The youth end up thinking it is okay for them to bully others and some might not realize that what they are doing is bullying. Bennett (2019) states,

> Parents assume that a little roughhousing or sarcasm is a typical element of the sibling dynamic—but it frequently escalates and one sibling begins to feel harassed. Sibling bullying can lower self-esteem and lead to emotional issues such as discouragement, loneliness, and melancholy. As a result, a young youth may suffer in school since they are unable to focus on their task.

Lack of Mental Health Support

All the issues the youths have even when they are in the womb of their mother affects them in their daily lives especially when it comes to school. Most of their time is spent at school and teachers notice things with students that their parents can't tell. According to Casali,

> Environmental factors that trigger mental health problems can happen at school, or stem from a school-related experience. For example, common reasons that teenagers struggle with mental illness include: Stress related to academic or athletic performance, Bullying or inability to fit in with social circles, Low self-esteem and self-worth (i.e. feelings of inadequacy), Social expectations and the desire to be or look a certain way, Verbal, physical, or emotional abuse, Traumatic experiences, such as an accident or loss of a loved one, Substance abuse, which may stem from peer pressure, Constant worry or

anxiety about other life stressors, An unstable home environment or unsafe living conditions. (2022)

Mental health can be caused by various things that sometimes we don't realize when it comes to the things that Casali mentioned schools don't really talk about any of these topics that can help with a child's mental health. Schools have a lack of support and don't really know how to respond when it comes to having a situation that involves their mental health. Not all schools have social workers nor have the resources to help out the children in their needs. In today's world it is very important to have resources for the youth to seek because they are very exposed to things at their age they should be exposed. Some of the things that happen to a youth at school can really affect a child mentally and really impact the way they live their life from that day on.

Schools don't just have a lack of mental health support for children, but most children suffer from depression and a lot of the time schools don't really take the opportunity to help those kids in need or just to have the ability to support the youth. A lot of youth suffer from depression. Not all schools have the ability to have a social worker at the school or at the school sites. When the youth start to reach a certain age a lof of things start to happen in their lives that things charge to change little by little and it can be very difficult for some children to cop with that being in a school where there is no support can also trigger children to start having depression and start shifting their little brains where they should for example they start having suicidal thoughts Staff Newport Acadamey (2023) states:

Research has found that bullying and depression in school are often related. Victims of bullying in school are at greater risk for depression and suicide. According to the CDC, high school students who are bullied are up to 320 percent likelier to die by suicide. When schools reopened after pandemic lockdowns, teen suicides increased by 12–18

percent as compared to pre-pandemic levels. In the study cited above, researchers concluded that bullying in school was the most likely cause for the rise in teen suicides.

Consequences

Gang Involvement and Possible Incarceration

AACAP (2017) states, among the risk factors that can contribute to a kid or adolescent joining a gang are growing up in a gang-infested neighborhood, a family history of gang involvement, a history of domestic violence in the family, insufficient adult supervision where no one is looking out for the children and unstructured free time, typically after school and on the weekends. There is also a lack of positive role models for these children and exposure to media that glorifies gang violence (AACAP, 2017). The youth who have grow up in this environment can struggle in life to try and get out of these because this is all they have seen and feel like they have no way out having family members who have had any type of domestic violence in there home struggle in life because they think it is okay and think it is normal of what they have gone through others are just traumatized and have seen a lot that are scared of being themselves because they are afraid that someone will hurt them. The youth in these situations feel a like of support and motivation to continue in the right path and doing better for themselves so that when they grow up they dont have to struggle as much as how they are doing now

An adult has the responsibility of guiding a child to the right path and allowing a child to be successful and showing them the right thing in life. Sometimes a youth is going to want to take the easy way out in order for them not to struggle in life. According to the Office of Justice Programs (2023),

Some youth believe that joining a gang will protect them from neighborhood crime and violence. However, research shows that gang-involved youth are actually more likely to

be victims of violence and more likely to commit crimes, leading to higher rates of arrest

and incarceration. Growing up in a violent family environment and experiencing

school-related problems, such as academic failure and negative labeling, have been

identified as risk factors for youth joining a gang.

Low Self Esteem

Most of these children's self-esteem is also low. They also experience hopelessness

regarding the future as a result of inadequate educational or financial opportunities since they see

how their lives are now and maybe also because they see how all their family is the same way

the children believe that they have no brighter future than what they already have. According to

the ReachOut (2023),

> The most common causes of low self-esteem in teenagers are: unsupportive parents,
>
> carers or others that play an influential role in their life friends who are bad influences
>
> stressful life events such as divorce or moving houses, trauma or abuse, poor
>
> performance at school or, unrealistic goals, mood disorders such as depression,
>
> anxiety, bullying or loneliness, or ongoing medical issues.

Having low self esteem can affect any child at any age. It can be led by a long time thing or

something that has recently happened to a child that has made their self esteem change from one

say to another. It's not easy to get their self esteem up again and for them to start having the

confidence in themselves to believe that they can gain their confidence back and unfortunately

this can lead to so many issues in their lives that can hurt them when they en duo becoming

adults.

Schools have a really high impact on children having a low self esteem because among

each others peers children tend to call each other names even if it is just "playing around" or

them just trying to be funny the person who is being attacked by the name calling or by someone calling them out for something about their physical appearance can really bring a child's self esteem down. It's also important to note that not only does this happen at school but also at their homes where people tend to say they call someone by a nickname but are just saying it in a "nice" way and mean no harm. In reality they don't know how much harm they do create on a child even if it's not intentional. Kumar (2022) states:

Feeling unsupported or criticized by important people in their lives, especially their parents. If children don't feel loved and valued, they may start to doubt themselves, their abilities, and their self-worth.As children get older, they will naturally experience more academic pressure – and they may not feel like they are measuring up to their peers, which can cause low self-esteem.

Children aren't feeling the support they need from those who are close to them. Those who they see as someone to look up to. Some children might not have the right support to keep them having low self esteem and this is where it all starts from having that support system where they have a positive impact on a child's life and have a good self esteem,

Teen Pregnancy

Another reason children need to have someone who cares about them is because they need someone who is going to give them a sex education. It is important for the youth to understand that have intercourse is not a game and if they do play to engage in any activity they need to be careful because it can lead to them expecting a baby. Teen pregnancy is really common with the youth because they don't have enough knowledge on how to take care of themselves and it occurs often with low income people.

"As of 2019, adolescents aged 15–19 years in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) had an estimated 21 million pregnancies each year, of which approximately 50% were unintended and which resulted in an estimated 12 million births" (WHO, 2023). It has been proven that low to mid income countries had the most pregnancies due to lack of knowledge. Not all the young mothers went through with the pregnancy, the majority of them didn't care for the baby, but this shows that there is a huge problem with the lack of education for the youth.

In the county of Santa Cruz County the rates have been dropping over the years which is something good for the community. There are programs that can help those who do become teen parents that can help them guide them to the right direction and help them finish school. In the article Santa Cruz Health Services Agency (2016) states:

In 2015, there were 2,833 live births to mothers who resided in Santa Cruz County, which was 236 (7.7%) fewer births than in 2014. The General Fertility Rate in 2015 was 51.9 births per 1,000 females of typical childbearing age (15-44 years) among Santa Cruz County residents, compared to 55.9 in 2014. The U.S. rate was 62.5 per 1,000 women, slightly below the rate for 2014 (CDC, Births: Preliminary Data for 2015). An additional 484 births were delivered in Santa Cruz County to mothers who were residents of other counties, primarily Monterey County (81%).

As it is shown in the article the rates are going down but this still doesn't mean it doesn't affect students. Not only does it affect the teen parents but also it affects those who live with the teens including the sibling. Even though the siblings aren't the ones becoming parents it affects them because their household is going to change and some parents don't take this in a good way when they find out that their teen is going to become a parent so young. This can lead children to act out and not make good choices for themselves and for those who surround them.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Minimal family support	Youth do not have healthy coping mechanisms	Gang involvement and possible incarceration
Unstable home lives		Low self esteem
Lack of mental health services		Teen Pregnancy

Project Description

Title: Destressing through Recreation

Project Description

The project will consist of a series of three workshops. First workshop would be giving the youth the questioners for them to fill out. Second workshop gathering the information and setting up the activity. Third workshop would be giving questionnaires out again and seeing where their levels of stress are after completing the exercise. The goals of these workshops are to reduce the amount of stress a youth has and help them understand they have adults who can support them.

Project Justification & Benefits

When youth children don't get the attention they need is when they start to act in a way that can get them into problems. This can be prevented if the youth has someone to lean on, such as a mentor who can keep them out of trouble and guide them through the right path. The youth can be at risk if they feel alone, depressed or feel sad. LaNet Culpepper (2014) discusses different types of support the youth can have and how they can use it. It also talks about Mentoring programs that have also been shown to foster connections that support better

behavioral and academic performance in youth (LaNet Culpepper, 2014). As a result, mentorship can operate as a barrier against many of the bad consequences that affect at-risk adolescents.

This would address the contributing factor of dealing with family issues. The students would need to talk about the problem and learn how to express themselves by either acknowledging the problem or talking about the problem with someone and trying to resolve the matter with their family members and try to make a change for themselves. It's also a good life skill because as the older the youth gets the more they will understand that life isn't always as easy as they think and by making bad decisions it's not always going to help them to be successful in life.

This meets the standards because a lot of this children don't know how to talk their problems or don't know how to address these issues that they tend to lean all their problems into making bad choices in life a lot of this kids don't know how to problem solve and just know how to lash out and not talk out their problems. This will help them be more open minded and see if they can change their perspectives about life. This will also help them open up their minds.

The benefits from this project would be that the students will learn to find better solutions to their problems. They will learn how to talk things out when things are bothering them and they will learn how to problem solve without acting out and will learn how to solve problems. The impacts that this will have on the agency is that they can get really good reviews and helping out those kids that need the help and showing them different methods that can help them throughout their life another thing that also can help out the agency is that they will have children that create less problems and the agency can focus more on other things that can benefit the children

Implementation Plan

In the first workshop the students will be handed a questionnaire and they will be asked how stressed they are and where they are stressed the most. The first question for them to answer would be how stressed they are feeling to say they will have to answer not stressed, stressed, neutral , somewhat stressed, extremely stressed. The students will also be asked what causes those stress levels. They would have 3 choices: home, school, both or other and they would have to say what stressed them out. Their last question would be what do they do to minimize those stressors and their options would be art, talking to someone, deep breathing or meditation or exercise/sport. This would be the first workshop.

The second workshop would be doing what relaxes the students more depending on what was chosen by the majority and the students will be assigned to do that relaxation workshop. The goal is for the students to control their stress levels while doing the workshop and see if it has helped them after they have done the questioner at the beginning after the students have finished the third workshop would come to place.

The third workshop after the relaxation workshop is done will be giving the questioner once again with the same questions about how stressed they are feeling to say they will have to answer not stressed, stressed, neutral, somewhat stressed, extremely stressed. The goal is for them to blow off steam and can learn to cope with these relaxation methods for the future so that when they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed they are able to cope with that stress a little more than they did before

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

The assessment plan would be giving the youth the survey before they start on the project. After the students do the project they will then get the survey once again to see where

they have their stress levels. The purpose of this activity is to see if their stress levels have gone down before doing the project. After the ending survey the information would be gathered to see if the activities worked and talk to the children on how to cope with their stress instead of acting out and solving their issues with violence. The expected outcome is that the youth that participate will have a reduced stress level. The children are also expected to learn that there are different ways to relieve stress.

Project Results

The results of the project did not come as planned. Upon surveying the students about their stress level, most of the students who completed the workshop said they were not feeling stressed but did mention that the way they cope with stress is by playing sports. The children at the youth center all seemed to really enjoy being active and playing sports. This was not expected as many of the students don't really have much guidance in school and school work. Most of the youth didn't seem bothered by any of the workload the schools give them or don't seem to mind the problems they have at home or any other place. Upon doing the workshop it seemed like you youth really didn't any motivation to get their school work done or they didn't seem bothered by any of there problems they had

Even though the project did not see the expected results, it is believed that the last workshop which was more hands-on really helped the youth blow off some steam. They really seemed to be enjoying playing a sport that they all enjoyed. The methods that were gathered for evidence were the questionnaires that the students were handed out, upon looking at the answers they provided from before and after the workshops. After the last workshop the students felt less tense than at the beginning of the workshop. Even if the project did not go exactly as planned, the observation upon doing this felt like it did help the students out because before doing the

project the students felt tense and after the project the students felt like they had less tension and were able to not think about the stressors they had. If the students were to take this a little more seriously the results would have been different even though they mention they didn't have any stressors, the tension their body gave before and after showed a different thing.
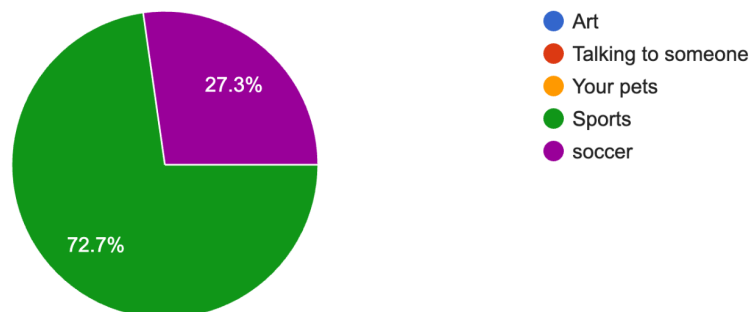
How stressed are you feeling today?
11 responses

● Not Stressed
● Stressed
● Neutral
● Somewhat Stressed
● Extremely Stressed

What do you do to minimize those stressors?
11 responses

● Art
● Talking to someone
● Your pets
● Sports
● soccer

Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion the purpose of this project was to help the youth take care of their mental health more. Learn better ways to cope with stress at home or anywhere they might be.

Sometimes youths at that age have difficulty coping with stress and the goal of this project was for them to also learn that not everything is resolved with violence and acting out. Life isn't as easy as others make it seem and hopefully the students realized that there are different ways to destress.

The recommendations for this agency based on the findings while working at this agency would be the following: The children need more guidance. They need more guidance and someone to look up to. Yet the agency might be all fun and games but that doesn't help the youth solve their problems or how to solve them. There needs to be a structure and guidance for the youth to follow. There are several youths that needed and still need assessments in many things but having a good structure for this to follow and learn something they can actually use would really help a lot of these kids especially staying out of trouble. The youth need to know there are healthier options after high school graduation for them to better themselves. The adults should be guiding them and teaching them that they have other options that they can explore. If the youth don't want to go to college as an adult showing them the pros to going or showing them that even if they still don't want to go the youth can still use other life skills that they have to make them successful in life

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Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Capstone ideas	Brainstorm	September 14	Geno
Capstone approved	Project approved	September 28	Geno
Capstone project started questionnaires	Approved	October 18	Geno /jorge
Second part of capstone (workshop)	Approved	October 26	Geno / jorge
End of activities survey	Done	November 3	Geno /jorge
Survey for stress level results	Gathering for results	November 3	Geno