

Albert Schweitzer Fellowship

Detroit Chapter

Project Description Form

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Program Name: Students Empowering Others (SEO)

Project Site/Agency: Covenant House Academy - East, Detroit, MI

Fellowship Project Description

Our project goals aimed to empower the students of Covenant House Academy - East on a multitude of sexual health related topics, and personal empowerment in the forms of career and education advancement. The evidence based program that we chose to utilize for our students was called “Making Proud Choices.” In addition, our program focused on management of difficult situations and coping exercises to equip the students with skills to build through these challenges and rise above. The scenarios discussed throughout the program included saying “no” in difficult situations, preventative medicine, recreational drug use, safe sex practices, and open communication skills. We strived to give them tools that would lead them towards a health promotion aspect of care, and will consequently prevent negative outcomes, as a result of disparities they may face.

We hoped to see their knowledge base on human sexuality and reproduction grow towards a positive direction. Once these individuals can truly understand the factors affecting their health, they can take action into their own hands, and prevent themselves from becoming a statistic. Through our diligent work, and interactive activities, we hoped to equip them with knowledge that can help to lower the incidences of sexually transmitted disease, and teen birth rates, in the city of Detroit. As the number of teen birth rates remains high, it was evident that action needed to be taken. Our program focused on both the education of males and females on sexual health and reproduction, and what they can do to prevent this from happening to them. It was important to us to present this information in a team approach, so that they would come to understand that it can be the actions of both individuals that can affect their outcomes. In addition, we hoped that our program would instill confidence in our students and make them active participants in their care. We believe that this idea would lead to empowerment of our

participants and allow them to grow a greater sense of confidence in their future decisions.

Furthermore, our biweekly meetings allowed us time to work to provide students with resources and a better chance for adequate time to explain the necessary topics. These biweekly meetings consisted of a time where students were the most available in their studies. We provided the option of meeting with students after class to discuss any questions they may have, further clarify topics, and be there as a resource for them if they needed anything. This proved to be beneficial because there were several students who met with us, and disclosed information. From there on, we were able to further connect them with staff or the needed information to help them with what they may have been struggling with at the time. These resources ranged from anything that sparked their interest in terms of health, life, family, and social interactions, to valuable sources of help that they can seek in times of need. We believed that having this type of access to resources would allow them to feel better cared for, and in more control of their lives, and their decisions.

In order to get these messages across and be more effective in our approach, we implemented a student run organization. We believed that this approach would facilitate interest, accountability, and interaction amongst the student body. This organization was called “Students Empowering Others (SEO).” This organization acted as a bridge between the information that was taught to these students, to what they would grow to be able to teach their peers and many others. In order to create a sense of unity and teamwork, we invited the students to display their picture and names on a board in the school hallway with the description of the student organization. This allowed students to feel pride in their involvement. Additionally, in order to help create a sense of leadership amongst the students, we allowed them to form five rules that every classmate would have to follow upon entering the classroom. This proved to be extremely

beneficial because it allowed for accountability of actions, and for the students to feel that their voice truly mattered within the room. Furthermore, with help from the faculty and school administration, we were able to allow this class to count as a health education credit for students towards their GED completion. Our hopes were that this student organization would become sustainable amongst the school system and the information provided could be carried forth for future students. Given the fast-paced world that we live in, we also aimed to be flexible with student schedules. Each student had their own personal life consisting of other commitments alongside completion of their GED. Thus, we didn't want this program to feel like a chore to students, but rather an advantageous opportunity.

Population served by the project

Although the teen birth rate has dropped tremendously in Detroit over the past 10 years, it still remains high compared to the Michigan population as a whole. In 2019 it was found to be coming to a gradual rise. Correspondingly, the recent uproar in sexually transmitted infection rates across metro Detroit is a public health crisis. Thus, something must continue to be done to promote health and prevent unwanted pregnancies, transmission of disease, and overall negative health outcomes. Therefore, as a team we decided to focus on adolescents between the ages of 14-18 years old at Covenant House Academy - East, an alternative school in Detroit. This alternative school accepts students who may be falling behind in high school, may have been kicked out of their current high school, or have other responsibilities at home that make it difficult to commit to school full time. Additionally, many of the students in attendance to this alternative school had never taken a sexual education or physical health course. This could have

been due to the factors mentioned above such as, dropping out and difficulty committing to the requirements of their high school.

Evaluation Plan

Our initial plan was to complete a pre- and post- survey on students' knowledge on topics related to sexual and reproductive health. Unfortunately, the beginning months of the program did not consistently have the same students. Once we were able to develop a consistent group of 7-10 students, we were able to build on their knowledge base and notice improvement.

Through the course of the program we emphasized the importance of continued growth and improvement from us and the students. Thus, we conducted evaluations throughout the program for negative and positive feedback. These evaluations consisted of verbal communication and responses from the students and faculty on things they liked, disliked, or wanted to see more of. In addition, we had the students write down any topics that they found interesting or wanted to know more about. These were then taken into consideration and incorporated in the following weeks in the forms of various activities for the students. These evaluations allowed us to gauge areas in which we need to focus more of our time to promote project engagement and continuation upon fellowship completion. Additionally, it allowed us to further understand which teaching styles, skills, and activities were better able to foster the growth and education of our students.

Seeing that we were unable to have a pre-survey with our final group of students we decided to evaluate their thoughts on the course, changed behaviors, and self-awareness. The questions were open-ended to provide the opportunity for any comments, positive or negative. Of the students who completed the final evaluations, a majority of them expressed their changed sexual practices and have found themselves more knowledgeable on the subject. Additionally,

they reported an ability to be able to relay and share this information with peers. As a result of the class, they were able to better understand the topics presented, and how their current decisions could come to affect their future selves. Furthermore, the students reported in these evaluations, that the methods of teaching were beneficial, especially the skit acting that was provided in our evidence-based education program.

Sustainability

In order to sustain this project beyond our time, we strived to educate and empower the students and faculty in which we encountered. We hoped that faculty participation would increase student engagement and permit continuity of the program through the school. This proved to be rather difficult due to lack of faculty availability, willingness to participate, and limited resources at the institution. Given the current educational and professional involvement of the two of us, we are unable to sustain the program on our own. In case of any changes within the school system, we provided our site mentor with all of the needed information, packets, binder, and activities of our evidence based educational program. Additionally, we gave them the option to reach out to either of us, if anything were to change on their end, or if they needed help or had questions regarding the educational information. We firmly believe in the future of our program and the positive impact that it will grow to have on this population. In order to ensure sustainability, we have looked into funding for the program for years to come. Any little bit helps, and we believe in the potential of our students and the true positive impact that comes from programs such as these.

Reflection

Our work was steered by the ideas of diversity and inclusion in an effort to sprout change amongst the rising youth in America. We strived to provide a sense of identity and direction through continuous improvement efforts with the help of the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship. The Fellowship presented us with the opportunity to discuss emerging issues in public health with experienced professionals. Our constructive conversations provided us with different perspectives on key issues, providing us the ability to approach a problem with a holistic view. It is common to forget that public health is important for every kind of work whether it's healthcare or business. This opportunity allowed us to meet key players from different backgrounds from our very own hometown. Also, one of our favorite parts of the fellowship was discussing our project with other fellows. This particularly allowed us to gain insight on different problem-solving techniques and how to better adapt to different challenges. Our Wednesday night meetings were filled with stimulating conversation and debates that continued through the course of our fellowship.

In regard to our project, we have experienced many boulders along the way that have taught us to be resilient and adaptable. The project had its challenges from the very beginning with finding an appropriate setting for our program. Once that was established, student participation and engagement presented itself as an issue. Furthermore, we worked alongside our site and faculty mentors to learn what would help us to best work through these boulders. These interactions proved to be beneficial in helping us overcome these bumps in the road, and to continue pushing forward.

All in all, we enjoyed our time at the school and the ability to connect with the students on a personal level. The relationships made along the way with our other fellows and program

advisors are bound to last a lifetime. We are very excited to have participated in such a prestigious program, and we can go confidently in the skills that we have obtained through implementation of our program and the skills that we will continue to grow and develop as Fellows for Life.

Impact Statement

As Albert Schweitzer fellows and healthcare providers we strive to positively influence health outcomes and promote best practice. The lack of knowledge on a subject matter may lead to uninformed decisions. We are trained to detect these situations in our communities to best approach the health disparity holistically. In the city of Detroit, we have identified a gap in education amongst our youth. The actualization of this gap came to us from our first-line experience as healthcare providers to the adolescent population. For students in secondary schools there is limited opportunity for the full high school experience, including proper sexual education and group activities. Therefore, our project goal was also guided towards the youth of Detroit towards attainment of self-actualization, resilience, and knowledge of the opportunities around them, all for means of better socioeconomic and health outcomes.

Through the months of September 2019-March 2020, we have collaborated with the staff at Covenant House Academy and our leaders at the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship, Detroit Chapter to implement a student engagement program and sexual education course. We were graced with the opportunity to get to know these students on a personal level. The consistent 7-10 students we worked with showed exemplary personal growth. Their life experiences are ones that some would not be able to imagine, thus open communication and creating a safe space were a priority for us. Throughout our session's students would often verbalize the uniqueness of the

experience, some shared that nobody in their lives had ever expressed such concern with their wellbeing. The adolescent population is at a critical stage in their development, experiencing pivotal years that may shape their future. Emphasis on their health and personal well-being should be encouraged by the community and healthcare team. As partners, we believe we have positively influenced these students to make informed decisions towards their personal health and professional growth.