Project Part II

**Theme: Enhancing After-School Programs for Children Facing
Homelessness and Mental Illness**

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Project Theme: Enhancing After-School Programs for Children Facing Homelessness and Mental Illness

Introduction:

In this project our aim is to enhance after-school programs tailored for children facing chronic homelessness and mental illness. This focus stems from conversations with Daniel Madrid, a specialist at Community of Friends, emphasizing the crucial need for comprehensive support.

Reasons for Choosing the Theme:

Our choice of this theme stems from the urgent need to address the multifaceted challenges encountered by children facing homelessness and mental illness. These children often lack stable living conditions and access to adequate mental health care, placing them at risk of academic underachievement, social isolation, and long-term negative outcomes. By focusing on enhancing after-school programs, we aim to provide a supportive and nurturing environment where these children can receive the holistic support they need to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

Theoretical Approach:

To theoretically fulfill the theme's requirements of enhancing after-school programs for children facing homelessness and mental illness, we have devised a comprehensive plan that encompasses several key components. Beginning with a thorough needs assessment involving input from stakeholders, including children, parents, educators, and mental health professionals, we will tailor programming to address specific academic, social, and emotional needs effectively. Adopting a trauma-informed approach to care, our programs will prioritize safety, trustworthiness, and collaboration, with staff receiving training on trauma-informed practices to create a supportive

environment. Establishing partnerships with community organizations and coordinating resources will ensure comprehensive support, including access to housing assistance and mental health treatment. Ongoing professional development and training for staff will further enhance program delivery and outcomes, covering topics such as child development and crisis intervention. Through robust data collection and evaluation, we will monitor program effectiveness and make data-driven decisions for continuous improvement, while prioritizing continuous stakeholder engagement to ensure responsiveness to evolving needs.

Expected Outcomes:

Our plan emphasizes the expected outcomes of our enhanced after-school programs for children facing homelessness and mental illness through a multifaceted approach. Firstly, we aim to <u>Improve Academic Performance and Engagement</u> by providing tailored academic support and measuring progress through quantitative data and qualitative feedback. Secondly, we seek to <u>Enhance Social and Emotional Well-being</u> by offering therapeutic interventions and social skill-building exercises, with indicators including improvements in self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Lastly, our goal is to cultivate long-term resilience and empowerment among children, tracking indicators such as problem-solving skills and adaptive coping strategies over time while empowering them to become advocates within their communities.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, by focusing on enhancing after-school programs for children facing homelessness and mental illness, we aim to provide a vital lifeline of support and opportunity for these vulnerable youth. Through a holistic and evidence-based approach, we seek to empower them to overcome adversity, achieve academic success, and thrive in their communities.

Survey List

Open-ended Questions:

CHILD:

1. How do you feel about your experience in the after-school program?

2. After participating in the after-school program, how much more confident do you feel about yourself and your abilities?

3. How has the after-school program helped improve your academic skills?

4. Have you learned any new hobbies or interests through the after-school program?

5. How much support and guidance has the program provided you with to overcome learning challenges?

PARENT:

1. How do you perceive your child's experience in the after-school program?

2. How much more confident does your child seem about themselves and their abilities after participating in the after-school program?

3. How has the after-school program helped improve your child's academic skills?

4. Have you noticed your child learning any new hobbies or interests through the after-school program?

5. How much support and guidance has the program provided your child with to overcome learning challenges?

Closed-ended Questions:

CHILD:

6. I feel motivated to complete school assignments independently after attending the program.

   - Strongly Agree

   - Agree

   - Neutral

   - Disagree

   - Strongly Disagree

7. The after-school program helped me develop social skills and make new friends.

   - Strongly Agree

   - Agree

   - Neutral

   - Disagree

   - Strongly Disagree

8. I enjoy attending the after-school program and participating in activities.

   1. Strongly Agree

   2. Agree

   3. Neutral

   4. Disagree

   5. Strongly Disagree

9. I find educational games like chess interesting and enjoyable.

   1. Strongly Agree

   2. Agree

3. Neutral

4. Disagree

5. Strongly Disagree

10. I feel safe and supported in the after-school program environment.

1. Strongly Agree

2. Agree

3. Neutral

4. Disagree

5. Strongly Disagree

PARENT:

6. My child feels motivated to complete school assignments independently after attending the program.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree

- Neutral

- Disagree

- Strongly Disagree

7. The after-school program helped my child develop social skills and make new friends.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree

- Neutral

- Disagree

- Strongly Disagree

8. My child seems to enjoy attending the after-school program and participating in activities.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree

- Neutral

- Disagree

- Strongly Disagree

9. My child finds educational games like chess interesting and enjoyable.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree

- Neutral

- Disagree

- Strongly Disagree

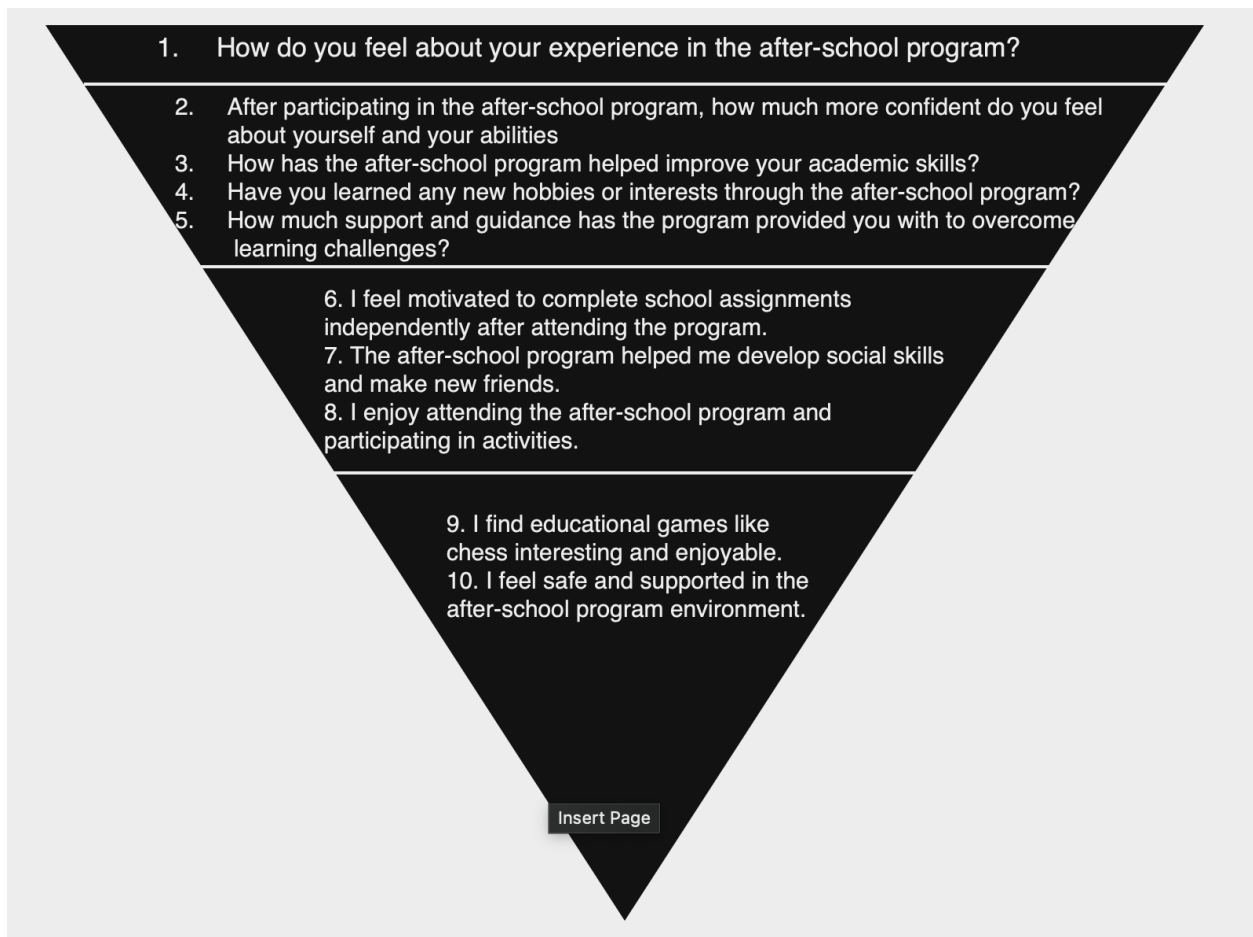10. My child feels safe and supported in the after-school program environment.

1. Strongly Agree

2. Agree

3. Neutral

4. Disagree

5. Strongly Disagree

Reasoning for including the corresponding survey questions:

The survey questions are designed to learn about how kids feel about their time in the after-school program. We ask straightforward questions about things like feeling more confident,

getting better at schoolwork, and making new friends. By asking these questions, we can understand what's working well and what could be improved in the program. This helps us make the after-school experience better for all the kids involved.

Survey Structure

1. How do you feel about your experience in the after-school program?
2. After participating in the after-school program, how much more confident do you feel about yourself and your abilities
3. How has the after-school program helped improve your academic skills?
4. Have you learned any new hobbies or interests through the after-school program?
5. How much support and guidance has the program provided you with to overcome learning challenges?
6. I feel motivated to complete school assignments independently after attending the program.
7. The after-school program helped me develop social skills and make new friends.
8. I enjoy attending the after-school program and participating in activities.
9. I find educational games like chess interesting and enjoyable.
10. I feel safe and supported in the after-school program environment.

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We use a funnel structure because it provides a non-threatening way to begin the survey.

Joint Application Development (JAD)

In addition to the survey questions, which aims to enhance after-school programs for children who are affected by homelessness, mental-illness, or trauma; there are other resources that can be used to enhance the after-school program. One developmental tool that can help improve the after-school's program is Joint Application Development, or JAD for short. JAD is a methodology that involves clients or end users in the design and development of a software application. This is done through a succession of collaborative workshops called JAD sessions.

JAD is a unique approach to software and systems development because it involves clients, customers, or end users throughout the product design and development lifecycle. It emphasizes a team-oriented development approach along with a group focuses problem-solving model. The JAD approach is useful for a variety of projects, such as new products, or product enhancements. Organizations dealing with a troubled history or relationship between their products and end users can also benefit from JAD for new product development or for enhancing or upgrading existing products.

JAD can be used to improve the after-school programs by first using the information from the surveys to target the specific problems students are facing. The next step would be to speak to teachers and see what needs to change in the software they use to teach the children. If no software is involved, you can take key principals from JAD such as JAD-like workshops to identify specific needs and challenges that need to be addressed. As well as the designs of programs.

The next approach that helps enhance after-school programs for children who are underserved is the Agile approach which is a term for a set of project management practices used in software development as well as in other fields. The key aspects of Agile is its iterative

development approach, its use of continuous feedback, its adaptability, and its focus on collaboration.

Agile principles can be very beneficial in enhancing after-school programs for underserved children. To begin, since agile is based on iterative activates, you can use this to break down modules into smaller, more digestible segments. This allows you to gather feedback from the students and other staff at the end of each module to adjust for the issues and add improvements to the next module. Next, would be Agile's focus on outcomes, rather than just the activities. This means that the agile approach focuses on feedback, such as observing children's participation, conducting different forms of surveys, and hold short discussions with the children. Once this data is gathered it can also be analyzed for feedback and identify what works well and what needs improvement. This feedback loop can continuously be used to refine the program, and track progress toward the overall goal of the program.

In conclusion, by leveraging both JAD and Agile methodologies, after-school programs can be significantly enhanced to better serve children facing homelessness, mental illness, or trauma. JAD workshops can be used to collaboratively identify specific needs and tailor programs accordingly, while Agile principles like iterative development and continuous feedback allow for ongoing improvement based on participant experiences. Through this combined approach, after-school programs can become more responsive, effective, and ultimately, a safe and nurturing space for these vulnerable children.