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MEMO

TO: Dr. Roxanne Y. Schwab, Branch Manager

FROM: Janeen Soria, Chief Center Assistant

DATE: December 14, 2017

SUBJECT: Mentors for Mental Health: A Mental Health Resource for Low-Income Students

PURPOSE

The purpose of the proposal is to request authorization to create a one-week training program for high schools with low-income. The program, Mentors for Mental Health, will educate and train school staff with supporting and handling students with mental health issues.

SUMMARY

Low-income schools need to have a mental health resource that fits the needs of its students. Mentors for Mental Health is a one-week program that trains school staff and upperclassmen to assist students with mental illnesses. The program has a timeline of five months with a budget of \$585,935. The program is available to 20 Chicago schools, and although many more schools are in need of this program, Adolescent Advice & Assistance is making a difference in education and mental health by improving the lives of thousands of individuals.

CHALLENGE

Abnormal psychology is defined to be “the scientific study of abnormal behavior undertaken to describe, predict, explain, and change abnormal patterns of functioning” (Comer 2). Abnormal behavior is categorized under four categories: deviance, distress, dysfunction, and danger. Is the person unusual, upsetting, interfering, and dangerous? Sometimes certain abnormal behaviors are symptoms to mental disorders, which can range from common mental illnesses, like depression and anxiety, to less frequent disorders like Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder. One of the issues with evaluating mental health is being unable to recognize symptoms. Does the person seem less active and social? Does the person seem less interested in his or her activities? If so, the person may be experiencing depression. Like any illness, physical or mental, it is better to take action as soon as the symptoms begin to appear so the victim of the illness may get treatment immediately.

School staff, specifically teachers, interact with students five times a week for about eight hours per school day. Teachers can observe students’ behavior and evaluate their mental well-being.

They can detect symptoms and decide if a student needs further attention for their mental health. Students would be exposed to treatment earlier than possibly realizing much later that they need help. However, school staff often lacks training with assisting students with mental disorders. The difficulty of identifying mental illnesses, and the shortage of education on mental illnesses, can be harmful to those who are suffering with them. When people are ignorant on mental health, they can be insensitive to what others are feeling and living with in their lives. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 37 percent of students who are 14-years-old or older dropped out of school. When students' mental health needs are not met, it may be difficult for them to continue their education.

The National Institute of Mental Health states that “36 percent of youth with any lifetime mental disorder received services, and only half of these youth who were severely impaired by their mental disorder received professional mental health treatment.” Providing a resource for students with mental illnesses would allow them to receive help. Although school staff can be trained for handling situations related to mental illness, students with low socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to certain mental illnesses because of the specific challenges they face. School staff needs to be aware of the diverse students in their schools so they can also support them. Many students with low socioeconomic status struggle with finding, and affording, mental health services, but going to a school that understands the importance of mental health can give these students at least one support system.

SOLUTION

Adolescent Advice & Assistance can create a one-week mental health program, Mentors for Mental Health, where high school students can receive support for their mental illnesses. The program will train high school staff and high school upperclassmen of participating schools to detect mental illnesses in students and help them find treatment. Mentors for Mental Health will educate all participants, but it will focus on teachers, student peers, and security guards. The program will offer informational courses on abnormal psychology, social psychology, and the specific challenges that students with low socioeconomic status face. It will also train them on how to approach students and offer support if they seem to be showing some symptoms of a mental illness.

Mentor for Mental Health aims to educate teachers, upperclassmen, and security guards because they are important figures in high schools that students interact with regularly. Teachers are the school staff that students most likely interact with the most. As an adult and a member of the school, a teacher can quickly assist a student who is suffering from poor mental health. An article from nprEd is about a student named Kate who is diagnosed with bulimia and depression. She states that “not a single principle or teacher or counselor” asked her what was wrong (Anderson and Cardoza, par. 17). Throughout high school, she felt “horrible” and “that nobody wanted to help” but if someone asked her what was wrong, then “she would have told them” (Anderson and Cardoza, par. 18). Mentors for Mental Health will prepare teachers, for example, by having them be observant of drastic mood changes in behavior, uncontrollable, harmful behavior, and behavior that expresses self-harm so stories like Kate's will not be a common occurrence (Mentalhealth, sec. 2). Moreover, educating high school juniors and seniors offers students peers

to connect with when they are hesitant in approaching school staff. Trained upperclassmen would also make students more comfortable addressing their mental health. When the students become more comfortable, they can feel supported in their academic environment and focus better on school. Mentors for Mental Health includes some high school students, because students are more comfortable communicating their stress and mental health to peers. Trained students can inform teachers on what challenges students are facing, and teachers can also gain insight on mental health and stress from a student's point of view. Based on their observations, upperclassmen and school staff can discuss what improvements the school should make when wanting to improve the mental health of their students.

Chicago has one of the nation's five largest public school districts and the city's "school security officers outnumber counselors" (Barnum, par. 1). Students will most likely see some security guards in one day but encounter a counselor occasionally within a week. In 2016, Chicago Public Schools had about 336,138 students, 1,416 security staff, and 658 counselors (Barnum, sec. 6). Mentors for Mental Health would train security guards, because they encounter students at the school entrance, in the hallways, and outside the school. They escort students to different parts of the school or out of the school if needed. Security is sometimes called when a student is being uncooperative when listening to staff. However, sometimes a student is being uncooperative because he or she has a mental illness. If the student has social anxiety disorder, for example, he or she may get a panic attack in class and be unable to physically move or follow directions, which could be misinterpreted to disobedience, and the officer may roughly escort the student out of the class. If security staff was trained by Mentors for Mental Health, they would be aware that sometimes touching someone during a panic attack causes further distress. With proper training, security guards will know how to recognize if a student is being uncooperative or if he or she is unable to cooperate.

In many Chicago schools, students' income is diverse where it can range from low income to high income. Higher income does not mean a person cannot have a mental illness, and Mentors for Mental Health supports any student suffering with mental illness. However, the one-week program is offered to low-income schools that have a high population of students with low socioeconomic status. People with low socioeconomic status have a strong and consistent negative correlation with mental illness. In other words, the lower a person's socioeconomic status is, the more he or she will be at risk for a mental disability and psychiatric hospitalization (Hudson 5). Stressors, what causes stress, like unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and poverty contribute to poor mental health. Mental disorders like major depressive disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, and general anxiety disorder are found within about 35 percent of welfare recipients (Fccmh). Moreover, students with low socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to mental illnesses, and they also have difficulty finding resources because "instead of receiving the support they need, they are often discriminated against, rejected, and ridiculed in school" (Drew et al 5). If a student is mentally ill and is living in poverty, for instance, he or she is also at risk for "worsening mental disorders" (Drew et al 8). The training program aims to recognize the hardships students with low socioeconomic status face and provide them with a reliable mental health resource.

The one-week program will be available to 20 low-income Chicago schools where 50 staff members and 10 high school juniors and 10 high school seniors per participating school can be a part of the program. Upperclassmen must apply to participate and must receive parent permission, as they will receive training from outside of their school. They will be chosen based on leadership qualities, passion to help others, recommendations, and good academic standing. Mentors for Mental health is divided into two parts: lecture and training. From Monday to Wednesday, participants will be a part of a four-hour lecture, from 10 a.m to 3 p.m, of the subject matter of that day. Participants will be served lunch and will have time from noon to 1 p.m to eat. Monday's lecture is about abnormal psychology, which is about different mental disorders and detecting their symptoms. Tuesday's lecture is about social psychology, which is about the effects of social exchanges on people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Wednesday is specifically dedicated to educate the audience on challenges that people of low socioeconomic status face. For instance, participants will be aware of how low-income students are more susceptible to mental illnesses like major depression, which more frequent in people of lower socioeconomic status (Hudson 8). From Friday to Sunday, school staff and upperclassmen will receive training on how to approach students who may be showing signs of a mental illness. Training is from 10 a.m to 3 p.m with the lunch break at noon to 1 p.m. School staff and upperclassmen will be divided into groups to do activities. The activities will consist of analyzing face expressions and body language, quizzing each other on mental illnesses and symptoms, and role playing activities where participants pretend to be in a realistic situation. They will also receive informational manuals and pamphlets to use as reference once the training program is over. The material ranges from directions on who to contact if a student needs professional help to instructions on comforting someone from a panic attack. Mentors for Mental Health will prepare participants for unexpected situations.

In Chicago, it is not uncommon that students from poor communities attend low-income schools in their neighborhood. Schools have counselors and school therapists, but there is not enough within a school, and some do not have enough funding to hire more professionals. Mentors for Mental Health is affordable for low-income schools because it does not require the school to hire more staff. It educates current staff and causes more overall support to students with mental disorders.

BUDGET

The following is an organized budget for the proposed project.

Lecture Material	Price (\$) for one (1)		# of Participants		# of Schools	Cost (\$)
Abnormal Psychology textbook	\$120	X	70	X	20	\$168,000
Social Psychology	\$250	X	70	X	20	\$350,000

textbook					
Total: \$518,000					

Psychology Professional	Price per Day (\$)		#of Days		# of Instructors	Total Cost (\$)
Psychology PhD	\$345	X	7	X	9	\$21,735

Location	Price per Day (\$)		#of Days	Total Cost (\$)
Sheraton Chicago Ballroom	\$4600	X	7	\$32,200

The following calculates the total cost for the proposed budget.

Project Materials	Cost (\$)
Lecture Material	\$518,000
Psychology Professionals	\$21,735
Location	\$32,200
Office Supplies (pens, pencils, paper, etc.)	\$5000
Lunch Food	\$9000
Total: \$585,935	

TIMELINE

The following is a schedule of tasks that needs to be completed for this project.

Five months:

- Months 1-2:

- search and hire qualified psychology professionals (Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Doctorates of Psychology)
- make a reservation for a meeting space (capacity at least 1500 persons)
- Months 3-4:
 - qualified psychology professionals make appropriate lecture course material (presentations, manuals, pamphlets)
 - qualified psychology professionals make appropriate training activities (handouts, quizzes, group exercises)
 - gather supplies
- Month 5:
 - advertise and find participants (schools, school staff, upperclassmen)
 - get parent permission from upperclassmen participants
 - decide lunch options

QUALIFICATIONS

I am working toward a Psychology minor, and I have taken Statistics, Abnormal Psychology, Psychology of Personality, and Psychology of Sex and Gender Differences. I have experience interacting and working with diverse people, because I have tutored students in grades K-12, and I was a mentor for two high school students and one college student. I am informed of the need for mental health resources in schools from listening to personal stories from friends with mental illnesses. As a former Chicago Public School student, I am aware of the lack of mental health support in Chicago schools. I have done research on mental health from reliable psychology sources like psychology organizations, published journals, and a textbook.

CONCLUSION

Mentors for Mental Health needs funding and support from Adolescent Advice & Assistance. It would be a beneficial investment for the company. Support for the training program means supporting adolescents' mental health and education. Incorporating the program will cause more recognition on mental disorders and more recognition for the company. If Mentors for Mental Health receives funding, Adolescent Advice & Assistance will be known for its compassion and diverse services.

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