MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS INITIATIVE

IMPACT REPORT

Although it was only 4 years ago, the time before 2020 seems like another age. Since the start pandemic, we lived through lockdowns, furloughs, periods of long isolation, sickness, death, political unrest, and witnessing the slaying of unarmed African Americans on our screens. The events since the start of 2020 have been harrowing to say the least. As we continue to navigate the changing landscape of our new world post pandemic, the toll of living through such, has implications beyond our physical health. Even more so in the city of Newark, a city that is predominantly black and brown, have high unemployment rates and underlying health issues. Over a 6-month period, 4 community-based organizations that engage teens and youth worked to implement and expand wellness programming within their organization to address, support and create spaces for individuals who may be struggling with the new status quo.
1. **United Community Corporation**

“Our goal was to provide many opportunities for youth and families to receive the help they needed in comfortable and safe spaces. An essential outcome of this project was to help families become self-sufficient, which UCC recognized as a contributing factor in promoting and sustaining mental health and wellness. UCC utilized various channels such as Art to connect with youth and families while ensuring safe spaces and encouraging discussions about mental health and available resources. Mental health comes in many forms, and with this project, UCC was able to address each form individually and collectively.”

2. **Sarah Ward Nursery**

“The purpose of our Strengthening Families project was to present to our at-risk families an evidence-based framework of tools that would enhance the family dynamics and foster family unity.”

- Parents & children ate meals together.
- Parents participated in an adult version of learning the protective factors.
- Children participated in a child version of learning the protective factors.
- Family recapped key points and takeaway of the lesson.

3. **Boys and Girls Club Newark**

“Historically we have integrated social and emotional support into our daily afterschool and summer program by engaging BGCN members in groups that focus on coping skill development and emotion regulation. With the support of the MHFA grant, we have expanded the Wellness program into a full-scale mental and behavioral health clinic to serve the greater Newark through individual and group therapy.”

4. **Gem Project**

Hosted a youth summit. It convened a cohort of students to establish good mental health practices for youth within the City of Newark, while also training their peers and themselves in youth organizing fundamentals. It amplified youth voices—while sharing tools to empower youth to facilitate effective demonstrations to address everyday issues within their collective spaces. Additionally, we hosted Growing Up – Newark. A screening, powered by Disney+. It brought many young people and community leaders together to discuss varying mental health challenges through film and discussion at CityPlex 12.
Sixteen students participated in a mini-series consisting of three half-hour (typically 45 min) micro-sessions focusing on Art Therapy and Mental Health. This insightful and engaging mini-series was designed to incorporate creative methods to bring awareness of self-expression using art. Via art therapy, these sessions evoked a positive change in the minds of its participants as they learned skills to help them cope and better navigate life. They discovered how to incorporate art to promote growth, healing, and transformation as many of today’s youth face several stresses including pain, fear, anxiety, anger, grief & loss to name a few. We discussed anger management, goal setting, self-esteem, bullying, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, positive decision-making, drugs, mental health awareness, and coping strategies. This mini-series increased knowledge and encouraged participants to enjoy the arts further and be bold in self-expression while understanding how the arts can help manage mental health. There were also 6 community-based events held over the 6-month that promoted wellness. These included a mental wellness fair and a survivor’s brunch.
Sarah Ward Nursery

We conducted 14 – week Family training sessions with 10 families which was comprised of 20 adults and 14 children a total of 34 participants.

- Parents & children eat meals together.
- Parents participant in an adult version of learning the protective factors.
- Children participate in a child version of learning the protective factors.
- Family combines to recap the key points and takeaway of the lesson.
As of January 2023, 152 people ages ranging from 6-45 have benefitted from the program. All clients are racial or ethnic minorities, youth under 18, adults, socioeconomically disadvantaged, uninsured, or underinsured people.

- 12 girls aged 12-13 participated in a 4-week girls’ group
- 40 boys aged 8-13 participated in a 10-week character leadership and positive behavior group
- 65 boys and girls ages ranging from 6-9 participated in a 10-week coping skill and emotional regulation group
- 22 girls aged from 7-13 have participated in a 10-week girls’ group
- 8 boys and girls aged from 14-16 participated in a 10-week identifying and building healthy relationship group
- 5 participants ages 14-45 have registered for the mental health clinic and began their 10-week solution focused therapy
The Gem Project

The Gem Project provided a paid summer and fall fellowship, from June 20, 2022 through August 19, 2022 and October 11, 2022 through December 9, 2022. It convened a cohort of college and high school students to convene and facilitate a citywide youth-led youth organizing and training conference. Throughout the programs 8 weeks during the summer, college-age (10) youth learned about the basics of youth organizing and facilitation surrounding justice pillars: education, youth justice, and health and facilitated workshops for 45 high school aged youth.

A total of 75 youth attended the Disney + Plus Growing Up film series. The short film screening explored the lived experiences and identities of young people and the varying mental health challenges they navigate today. The event was hosted by Amanda Ebokosia, Founder and CEO of the Gem project and Adaobi Ndupu, Director of Health with United Wat of Greater Newark. Discussions followed and were facilitated by appointed community members: Stacy Tyndall-Brown, Program Manager at The Gem Project; Jennifer Made, Manager of Youth Programs at Abbott Leadership Institute; and A'dorian Murray Thomas, Founder & CEO at SHEWins, Inc. The Gem Project also distributed 150 kindness bags that included books, affirmation cards and ways to pay it forward.
Looking to the Future

The main purpose of this initiative was to provide supports to CBO’s within the city who promote mental health wellness, provide services to youth & families and who may also need supports themselves as a result of what they encounter on a daily bases.

United Way is proud to lead this work and is grateful to the organizations that are on the front lines. Although a small cohort, the impact that these 4 organizations had is immeasurable. If there is anything that pandemic revealed in its aftermath, it’s that our community while in some ways resilient, is also incredibly vulnerable. The role United Way plays is vital in convening partners to ensure our community heals and thrives physically and mentally.
THANK YOU!

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