THE ROCK CENTER

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MINDFULNESS, ARTS, HEALING, AND A SENSE OF BELONGING

Overview

Statement of Problem:

The Traditional Model of Mental Healthcare is Not Sufficient and Rife with Barriers

We continue to see trends of mental health decline, particularly for youth. There are many barriers and deficits that lie within the traditional approach to mental healthcare (one-on-one therapy in an office setting). Cost, modality, and accessibility are the greatest barriers to effectively address the youth mental health crisis.

Trends in Distress	Barriers in Access and Cost	Cultural Inequities in Access to Care
"Feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness—as well as suicidal thoughts and behavior—increased by about 40% among young people over the last 10 years" (American Psychological Association: 2023 Trends Report)	*59.8% of youth with major depression do not receive any mental health treatment, (Mental Health America: 2023 State of Mental Health Care in America Report)*	*According to the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), of the nearly 22% of Hispanic and Latinx Americans who reported having a mental illness in 2021, only 36% received services (compared to 52% of non-Hispanic Whites), and of the 21% of Black Americans who reported having a mental illness in 2021, only 39% received mental health services (compared to 52% of non-Hispanic Whites).*
https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/01/trends-improving-youth-mental-health	https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/2023-State-of-Mental-Health-in-America-Report.pdf	https://www.samhsa.gov/behavioral-health-equity
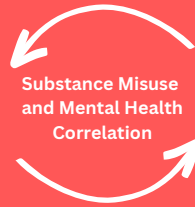
Our Solution:

The Rock Center Reimagines and Expands Mental Wellness Models of Care

We provide trauma-informed, culturally-responsive, mental wellness programming for youth in after-school programs called **Peace Warriors.**

If cost, access, and the traditional 1:1 modality of care are creating barriers to sufficiently address the mental health and substance use crisis amongst youth, our solution is to provide no-cost, accessible, community-based models of care. ***In a community context, mental health care takes a more holistic, relevant, and inclusive approach.***

School Programming provides School Connectedness

"School connectedness, defined in this report as feeling close to people at school, has a long-lasting, protective impact for adolescents well into adulthood," (CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021)

By integrating trauma-informed mental wellness programming directly into a high-access community environment to an age group significantly vulnerable to and affected by the worsening mental health crisis, we are leading the charge in finding creative, effective, evidence-based ways to engage youth, reduce stigma, and increase access to higher levels of care if needed (acting as a "gateway into services," as Colizzi et al. refers to it).

"The association of sense of belonging with both mental health and risky alcohol use outcomes in this study suggests that a sense of belonging needs to become a routine focus of assessment and intervention for adverse mental health and substance use outcomes," (Torgerson, 2018, School of Family Studies and Human Services)

Alternative use of community mental health resources

We are "responding to mental health disparities in under-served communities" through improving access and equitability, and we are providing care that has a "contextually-relevant understanding of children's mental health"—all identified as clinical recommendations to more effectively and sufficiently address the mental healthcare crisis among youth. Ultimately, *we are filling the gap*.

Trauma Informed Model

We incorporate trauma-informed, evidence-based practices into our programming, and our staff is trained and supported by our **embedded mental health consultant.**

The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) study (Kaiser, CDC, 1997), one of the largest studies to ever be conducted identifying the correlation between childhood trauma and disease/early death, interviewed over 17,000 people around ten different adverse childhood events.

People with 4+ ACES were 2-5x more likely to develop chronic health conditions (including diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and many more), clinical depression, suicidality, and substance abuse disorders.

According to the National Resilience Institute, "seventy-two percent of children and youth will experience at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) before the age of 18" (NRI, 2017).

So we...

Build Mental Wellness through Connection, Coping, and Competency

The ARC Model

Informed by Margaret Blaustein's Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency (ARC) model, the ROCK Center's foundation of all programming is built from this. The ARC model is a "flexible, culturally-informed, components-based intervention developed for children and adolescents who have experienced complex trauma". ARC identifies attachment (connection), self-regulation (coping), and competency as the areas of focus, as these are the major areas of impairment after trauma.

Peace Warriors	Connection	Coping	Competency
What it is	*The ARC model emphasizes the importance of creating safe and nurturing environments where attachments/ connections can develop. A sense of belonging has been deemed one of the greatest antidotes to trauma, depression, suicidality, and a number of other dire experiences, and is considered critical for academic success. When positive relationships and attachments form, a sense of belonging is created.*	*Developmental trauma has a significant impact on a child's ability to regulate physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive experience. The ARC model highlights strategies to help youth build self-regulation skills, regaining a sense of control of self, our emotions, and our behaviors. Self-regulation and coping tools are core resiliency skills from trauma and stress, and are critical to counteract unhealthy coping skills (i.e. substance misuse).*	*Competency is the felt-sense of success and mastery at any particular task. When an individual experiences trauma, their brain undergoes a significant sense of helplessness in the face of the trauma. ARC interventions highlight the importance of children achieving mastery and success, to empower them to navigate life's challenges.*
How we do this	We begin every session with a small, facilitated community circle, with the intent to build healthy attachment/connection models and a sense of belonging. This creates the foundation from which emotional safety and vulnerability can be built within the group. With its root in Indigenous cultures, connection circles have also	Youth spend time at the start and end of each session learning and practicing self-regulation and emotional-capacity building tools. Examples of coping tools include: mindfulness, guided relaxation, sensory activities, mind-body connection awareness, and other tools to help youth learn to identify, name, and manage their emotions.	We partner with a different local artist to conduct workshops that create competency through the arts. These activities not only promote a sense of mastery but also boost self-esteem, another major protective buffer.

been identified as "culturally syntonic way to receive help".

Peace Warriors Community Circle

Our Impact

Through finding high-access points to youth, particularly those in areas experiencing high rates of trauma, we know that our programming has significant potential to be an avenue of care and an **"adjunct care model"** for promoting mental wellness amongst our youth. Our hope is that our Peace Warriors programming is not only changing the way the youth can experience a **more expansive model of mental healthcare, but also changing the way the community sees it.**

Of our students served,

95%

have indicated that they have increased connections to help and support

85%

have indicated increased ability to cope with challenges via coping skills

over 90%

have indicated an increase in their skills or awareness for addressing mental health and substance misuse issues

We are confident our work is breaking boundaries and altering the trajectory of the state of mental healthcare in the greater metro Denver area. It is our hope that our work can continue to expand to be a model of care across the city and the state.

Additional Sources and Research

More on the ACES Study: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html

More on the ARC Model: https://arcframework.org/what-is-arc/

2023 Trends Report: Kids Mental Health is in Crisis: https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/01/trends-improving-youth-mental-health

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