PROMISING STRATEGY:
STUDENT PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Advocating for Student Healing & Health
2023 SCHOOL HEALTH CONFERENCE
April 17, 2023
Agenda

• Introductions
• 10-Year Youth Mental Health Trends
• Addressing Gaps in Mental Health Workforce
• Value of Peer-to-Peer Supports
• Overview of Two Peer-to-Peer Programs
• Lessons Learned & Strategies for Success
Presenters

Rachel Minnick, MAEE
Chief Collaboration Officer
PRO Youth and Families

Raquel Shipp
Co-Founder/Executive Director
Sacramento Youth Center

Jacqueline Garner, MSW, LCSW
Director, Student Support Services
Sacramento City Unified School District
About Sacramento Youth Center

- Established 2019 in North Sacramento aiming to serve the underserved youth with quality space & programs for youth development and enrichment. Providing trained Peer Specialist mental/behavioral health support.

- Serving diverse youth 14 - 24 years avg. attendance 30 – 40 youth per day

- Community School Site via CDE Planning Grant in partnership with Community Collaborative Charter School

- Average of 30 youth on-site daily both students and youth community members

- Youth Peer Mentor programs are foundational to our center culture and success

- Based on SAMSHA's 8-Dimensions of Wellness framework

- Incorporates 21st skill building and workforce readiness
About PRO Youth

Fostering Hope

- **Founded as People Reaching Out in 1981**
  - Uplift community voice & youth advocacy skills
  - Prevent youth substance use
  - Mentoring

- **Rebranded as PRO Youth in 2017**
  - Added Youth & Family Collective

**Three major areas of work:**
- Youth Voice
- Wellness
- Collective Impact
Sacramento City Unified School District

• 11th Largest School District
• 73 Schools K-12
• Student Enrollment: over 38,000*
  • Over 67% identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged
  • 19% English Language learners
  • 36.9% students chronically absent

* 2022 data from CDE Data Dashboard
Why School-Based Peer-to-Peer Programs?

1. Meet the demand for culturally competent services

2. Improve campus wellness & school climate

3. Expand future mental health workforce
Youth Mental Health: 10-Year Trends

"...experiences of violence, mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors worsened significantly."

School connectedness, defined as feeling close to people at school, has a long-lasting, protective impact for adolescents well into adulthood...
"Increase access to needed services by improving school-based services..."
## Increasing Capacity in a Landscape of Vast Discrepancies in Mental Health Support

### California's Ratio of Students to School-Based Mental Health Professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>1 to 250</td>
<td>1 to 6,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>1 to 250</td>
<td>1 to 612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>1 to 500</td>
<td>1 to 998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High Quality Peer - to - Peer Programs:

• Increase student access to mental wellness supports
• Are a scalable, non-clinical, Tier 1 strategy
Peer-to-Peer Programs are one of the five essential strategies* for effective school-based mental health.

*therapy, non-traditional wellness programs, LGBTQIA support, parent/caregiver support, stigma reduction
# Continuum of Prevention & Care

## Tier 1: Prevention & Education

**Non-Clinical**

**Peer-to-Peer Support Programs**

## Tier 2: Intervention

**Clinical**

**Peer Specialists 18+**

## Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

**Licensed Professionals**

Peer-to-Peer programs support behavioral health career pathways.
Leveraging Department of Health Care Services funding to:

• Increase opportunities for peer specialists

• Increase mental health supports on campus/community settings
Peer-to-Peer programs increase equity and diversity by:

• Supporting youth from different backgrounds on path to mental health careers

• Diversifying the pool of trusted campus messengers who can reduce cultural stigmas

• Increasing the sense of belonging on campus

• Increasing knowledge of mental health resources
Overview of Two Peer-to-Peer Strategies

- Peer Mentors
- MindOneSix
Peer Mentors – Sacramento Youth Center

Supporting youth be campus resources to peers and making schools centers of wellness.

Peer Mentor Training - 80hrs (40hrs per semester)

• 24 lessons

• Including hands-on applications/awareness for on-campus, community & online

• Youth can support other campus programs

• Youth can serve as in-house resource for Community Schools
Peer Mentors: Workforce Development

Story of Sahar
- Peer mentor>intern>peer specialist trained – representing newcomer populations
- Now works for Sacramento-area behavioral health clinic

CTE Pathway
- SYC partnering with a charter school to increase on-campus support

Post Peer Mentor training - onsite internships or in the community to support workforce development pathway
- Summer School
- On-site peer support groups
MindOneSix – PRO Youth

• Created in 2020 as a COVID- relief response to youth mental health crisis

• 10 Lessons (16 hours) for HS students
  • Topics Include:
    • Defining mental health terms
    • Dimensions of wellness
    • Stigma reduction
    • Stress and the brain
    • Resiliency and self-care
    • Trusted adults
    • Impact of social media
    • Resources

• Delivered virtually by PRO youth development staff
MindOneSix – PRO Youth

2021-23 partnership with Sacramento City Unified School District

- Serving 5-7 schools
- Delivered on campus to middle and high school students

Delivered by community partners

- More diversity in trusted messengers
- Increase the capacity for PRO to offer the program
Impact of MindOneSix on Youth

• 87% learned new things about mental health and wellness.
• 70% felt more confident to talk with peers about mental health.
• 67% felt more confident to talk to family about mental health.
• 88% were interested in mental health and wellness careers.

Data from 2021 pilot cohort
Lessons Learned & Strategies for Success

Relationships & Communication

• Bureaucratic systems can make partnerships complex; new systems may need to be created

• Establish trust and relationships early

• Community partners need support to establish school relationships

• Clearly describe the resources a peer-to-peer program brings to a school

• Be proactive about communication and relationship development – it feels time consuming, but prevents mistrust and miscommunication
Lessons Learned & Strategies for Success

Relationships & Communication, cont'd

- MindOneSix project charter process increased success
  - Develops relationships among key partners
  - Specifies methods of communication
  - Determines decision-making expectations
  - Defines each partner's role/responsibility/expectations
Lessons Learned & Strategies for Success

Program Content

• Schools were fearful of launching programs that might trigger youth
• Provide district/admin a clear picture of what a program looks like in practice
• Explain how staff are trained
• Peer programs should not look or feel like an extension of the school day
• Community partners needed extra support with youth facilitation skills
• How students are recruited matters
• Curriculum needed to be adapted for younger students (MS versus HS students)
School-Based Peer-to-Peer Programs

Support the increasing demand for culturally competent mental health supports.

Improve campus wellness & school climate.

Provides students with workforce opportunities and expands future mental health workforce.
The Time is Now

"California schools have a historic opportunity to ensure equity and well-being for students across the state by investing in, establishing or expanding their own school-based mental health systems."

Advancing School-Based Mental Health in California, The California Children's Trust, 2022
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"I learned how to communicate to someone who is not doing well and how to communicate to someone when I am not feeling well."

- MindOneSix Participant