

DANIEL COMMUNITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
Division of Student Life
Blackburn Institute

S.M.I.L.E! TUSCALOOSA

(Sharing Methods of Indicating Levels of Emotion.)

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Tuscaloosa Mental Health Alliance, Indian Rivers Mental Health Center
and Tuscaloosa City schools



Changing the State: One Smile at a Time

Issues regarding mental health are often overlooked, misunderstood, and stigmatized. The mission of our project, SMILE! Tuscaloosa, is to destigmatize some of these issues and to promote a positive understanding of mental health.

Therefore, during the implementation of our project, we will provide an early educational experience to elementary school students in the Tuscaloosa City Schools system. We strive to help them understand the importance of good mental health, learn appropriate coping skills with challenges such as bullying, and how to healthily express and interpret their emotions.

We will do this by reading a book, created in a joint effort by Blackburn volunteers and the TMHA, to fourth and fifth grade students in the TCS system. The book will discuss bullying and will be accompanied with inter-active activities. This project is sustainable in nature, and its expenses are entirely covered by the Daniel Community Scholars funds.

Evidence of Need

In our research, we noticed a lack of programs and information about mental health available for a very vulnerable group in our state: elementary school-aged children. "Poverty and Adolescent Mental Health" illustrated the connection between poverty and mental illness in school aged children and young adults. African American children are twice as likely to live in poverty than a Caucasian child. While, Hispanic children are three times as likely.

According to American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the state of Alabama. Nearly twice as many people die by suicide in Alabama annually than by homicide. One person dies by suicide every 12 minutes. This leaves suicide to rank 4th in cause of death for children ages 10-14.



Community Partners

Project SMILE! Tuscaloosa will exist as a partnership between The Blackburn Institute, the Tuscaloosa Mental Health Alliance (TMHA), Indian Rivers Mental Health Center (IRMHC), and Tuscaloosa City Schools. These groups have expressed enthusiasm for this project, and have great resources to help with its implementation, including professionals in the field of mental health and professional connections to other community agencies.

People that have been involved with the development of this project include Joseph Abrams, President of TMHA; Terry Heverly, Chair of TMHA; Laura Reeves, Children's Services Manager at IRMHC and TMHA Board Member; Lindsay Preskenis, Children's Services Coordinator at IRMHC and TMHA member; Taylor Will, BSW Intern at IRMHC; Courtney Conner, an attorney and TMHA member; Amy Crosby from UA's Childhood Resource & Development Center and Project Launch; Portia Martin representing Coordination of Student Services of TCS; Audrey Ellis, Coordinator of Social Services of TCS; and Suzette Wyatt from TCS.

Sustainability

The initial stage of Project SMILE! Tuscaloosa is intended to last over the course of five months. Initial groundwork will begin in early December, leading up to the execution of the project that will take place throughout the month of April. This semester could be considered a pilot version of the program, as the Tuscaloosa Mental Health Alliance has expressed an interest in expanding its reach in the future, if successful, to Tuscaloosa County schools and other parts of the state.

One resource that is vital to sustainability of this project is the involvement of volunteers. Although we cannot guarantee the continued participation of Blackburn students, outside of the scope of the Daniel Community Scholars Program. We can, however, help our community partners connect with other organizations on campus, such as the Office of Educational Outreach, to find a new source of volunteers in the future.

NEVER GIVE UP ON SOMEONE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS. WHEN "I" IS REPLACED BY "WE", ILLNESS BECOMES WELLNESS. -SHANNON L. ALDER

A SMILE FROM A CHILD IS PACKAGED SUNSHINE AND RAINBOWS.

Project Activities

Project SMILE! Tuscaloosa is a community engagement initiative that consists of communicating healthy methods of emotional expression to Tuscaloosa youth through the composition and distribution of a children's book.

The primary role of volunteers will be to enter classrooms and discuss the book and its contents with fourth and fifth grade students. Additionally, volunteers with specific skills and interests are encouraged to assist with various background components of the project, including but not limited to: writing the storyline, composing illustrations, preparing goodie-bags for students and teachers, and spreading awareness about Project SMILE! Tuscaloosa and the book through social media and other outreach avenues..



Implementation and Logistics

Project Teams & Leaders:

Throughout the entirety of this project, a Project Coordinator will oversee its implementation. There will also be a Director of Logistics, Director of Media Relations, Volunteer Coordinator, Engagement Team Leaders, and Project Evaluation. During the initial stage of this project, there will also be an Art Team and Writing Team, who will work on the development of the book.

Budget and Expenses:

The current estimated implementation cost of Project Tuscaloosa is \$3213.90, leaving a remaining \$1786.10 of Project SMILE! additional Daniel Community Scholars funding for available use if deemed necessary by the Project Implementation Team and TMHA. Primary costs include the published book, printing materials, and thank you notes for each classroom.

Intended Outcome

Ultimately, the goal of this project is to promote positive attitudes about mental health, by providing 4th and 5th grade students in Tuscaloosa City Schools with advice regarding issues such as healthy expression of emotion, stress management, and bullying. In doing this, we will be serving a vulnerable group and destigmatizing an important issue.



One way that the success of this project can be measured is through activities done before and after the reading sessions, during which students fill out worksheets that describe their own views of mental health, bullying, and how to express their emotions. These worksheets can be a fun activity for the students, and a way for us to gain insight on what they took away from the book.

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