Get W.I.T.H. It! (Workshops in the Interest of Teen Health)

Book: T*hat's Not What Happened*, by Kody Keplinger

Description: Get W.I.T.H. It! is a monthly workshops designed to engage teens and youth on various topics that matter to them (not just what we think they want to learn about). Topics often include managing stress and anxiety, expectations & reality, sex and social issues, cyber bullying, peer pressure and more. Each workshop is highly engaging and designed to spark conversation between participants and when possible, facilitated by a local health care professional. The program begins with a Prezi that provides an overview of the topic (stress for example) and then builds a common understanding among the group. This leads into a free flowing discussion and a wrap up game as a form of reviewing the content (most often a game of family feud).

Materials: Handouts with helpful information (if applicable), laptop, projector, various refreshments

Estimated Cost: Library staff time (dependent on salary) and approximately $15 - $20 per workshop for light refreshments.

Prep time: Depends on the depth of information shared per topic. Content research/development can take anywhere from 2 to 5 hours.

Instructions:

Step 1) Understand Existing Gaps:

Utilize community outreach and focus groups to determine the needs/interest of your teens. What mental health supports does your library lack? Remember that one static program will not work for every system. We spent several weeks meeting with teens and youth to get a real understanding of what we could be doing to better serve them.

Step 2) Define Needs of Target Audience:

Do not start off by trying to program for your community, get your target audience involved in the process. If the focus is mental health, what challenges are they experiencing? What support would they like? Use that information as a starting point.

Step 3) Determine Project Outcome:

This is where you decide on the program structure. Would you like to meet once a month or is your community interested in meeting on a more regular basis? Do you like the activities mentioned in the description or do you prefer to modify the class? This is where you establish the core structure of the program and develop clear learning outcomes. Do you want teens in your community to learn about positive mental health or do you want your program to be a support group of teens experiencing similar issues? Identify clear and measureable outcomes to help you stay on track.

Step 4) Identify the Experts:

We were able to collaborate with our local hospital, but who are the experts in your community? Take your program plan and outreach to local organizations that you believe could help support your teens and establish potential ongoing partnerships.

Step 5) Promote to Target Audience:

So you want teens in your community to come out to your program, but how will they find out? Can you connect with schools to promote? Do you have a presence on social media that you can utilize?

Step 6) Implement, Evaluate, & Improve:

Track and measure your success? What does the success look like? Do participants feel better connected to their community? Have they made new friendships that last outside of the class? Do they feel more empowered to discuss their mental health and more aware of services/supports available to help them? That was how we measured our success!

Additional Resources:

If you're truly interested in doing more to support teen mental health, I recommend checking out The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults by Frances E. Jensen. It helped to provide me with a more educated insight into what teens are going though during their development and how it directly impacts their mental health. A ton of great content and an engaging read.

Learning Objective:

To provide teens in the community with an opportunity to learn about mental health and illnesses and community supports while discussing challenges that directly impact their healthy development.

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