

Growing Girls and GAME! (Guys' After-School Mentorship & Education) Program Report, 2021-2022

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Introduction

During the 2021-2022 academic year, the Growing Girls and GAME! psychosocial health programs successfully completed 20 lessons, using a combination of online and in-person learning. Participants learned about building healthy friendships, mental health and self-compassion, solving problems, self-esteem, media, body image, development, and planning for the future. (Please see appendix for the full schedule.) Twenty 5th and 6th grade students were recruited for Growing Girls and 11 5th and 6th grade students were recruited for GAME!. Barriers to not attending or completing the program included illness, enrolling for a single semester, accessibility and/or changes to availability (i.e., conflicting extracurricular activities), disinterest, or switching/leaving schools. Attendance increased during the spring semester as program registration reopened and more in-person sessions, including our annual field trip, were announced. Returning after a 2-year hiatus, the annual field trip to the University of Arizona (UArizona) hosted 16 program participants and the entire programmatic team, comprised of 5 Group Leaders, 2 managers/coordinators, and 1 director. During the field trip, participants started brainstorming about their future and enjoyed guided activities including a campus-wide photo scavenger hunt, a show at the Flandrau Science Center and Planetarium, and a tour of the Athletics Department and Jim Click Hall of Champions. Fourteen Growing Girls participants and 6 GAME! participants graduated the program on May 2, 2022. Of the 14 Growing Girls graduates, 8 participants attended weekly; of the 6 GAME! graduates, 4 attended weekly.



Modality

Per a collaborative decision between after-school coordinators and the Program Director, Growing Girls and GAME! programs were offered via hybrid modality to both Estes Elementary and Quail Run Elementary Schools (Marana Unified School District). Online sessions were coordinated using Google Classroom and hosted via Zoom while in-person sessions alternated between schools. Parents received

weekly emails from the Program Director regarding progress updates and announcements as well as a text reminder every Monday morning to encourage student attendance. Although the hybrid approach was optimistic, there were several planning and implementation challenges including minimal funding, adequate student representation from both schools, and lack consistency for stakeholders. Initially, club sessions were planned for 6-7 PM on Mondays, with in-person sessions beginning at 5:30 PM for dinner provided by the school(s) and lesson content beginning at 6 PM. (In-person sessions were offered via Zoom to accommodate families or students who wanted to remain at home.) Following the success of the first in-person session and feedback from students and staff, a small adjustment was made to the time to extend sessions to 2 full hours. Additional changes, including two in-person session cancellations, occurred during the fall as COVID-19 cases climbed at both schools: Our staff was quick to adjust our program schedules to offer both meetings online. A safety protocol was created in January 2021 to encourage Group Leaders to test regularly and improve mask adherence on site. Even during the height of Omicron in the spring, all 4 in-person sessions were successfully implemented in addition to the 6-hour UArizona field trip.

Parent feedback from the mid-year and end-of-year surveys revealed the programs were accessible to their student, even with small schedule changes, hosting at an alternate campus, or technology issues. As expected, students “really enjoyed the in-person sessions and looked forward to them.” In the mid-year survey, one parent mentioned they were hesitant for their student to participate during in-person sessions once the district lifted the mask mandate but appreciated that our program offered an online/virtual option and employed health and safety measures.

Impact

Growing Girls and GAME! Group Leaders were recruited from five UArizona colleges, interviewed, and selected during May-August 2021. Prior to their work on-site, Group Leaders were trained in mandated reporting, facilitation and group cohesion skills, and the Nurtured Heart Approach. Through the Zuckerman Family Center for Prevention and Health Promotion (ZFCPHP), 3 undergraduate students (Thea Christofferson, Taylor Younger, and Tammy Tran) and 1 graduate student (Elsa Loya) completed their internships with the Growing Girls program. Two undergraduate students (Alex Cote and Sam Rodriguez) completed their internships with the GAME! Program, alongside 1 volunteer (Frankie Romero), a returning Group Leader from '20-'21 academic year. With 8 team members in total from 4 different disciplines, this was the largest and most diverse programmatic team to date. Group Leaders demonstrated significant growth in skills and confidence through the academic year. Group Leaders provided comments about their experience below:

“I knew that I would learn more about public health programs and working with young people, however, I had no idea how much I would learn about myself and how much I would enjoy small program planning and evaluating tasks. This program exceeded my expectations in so many ways, especially with the program leadership team.”

“The lesson I will take with me throughout my professional career will be Nurtured Heart Training. This is a wonderful tool and I wish more people took this [training] and learned more about this approach.”

Below, parents shared any changes they noticed in their child following participation in Growing Girls or GAME!, as well as general comments about the program. (Please note: Personally identifiable information has been removed to protect the anonymity of student participants and parents.)

“I have seen my child become more confident.” -GAME! parent

“She will communicate more to explain herself and she will express her thoughts and feelings if she feels someone is not being treated correctly. She has expanded her scope of friends.” -Growing Girls parent

“[She] has had a lot of body changes this year. Our communication is great but having older role models helped her feel more comfortable with the changes” -Growing Girls parent

“[She] participated in Growing Girls for 2 years and the program has definitely provided her with information that is useful to her now and in the future. She enjoyed the classes and getting to know girls from [the other school] as well.” -Growing Girls parent

“[She] loved that it was a safe environment to speak freely in.” -Growing Girls parent

Additionally, one student provided unsolicited feedback about Growing Girls using the anonymous question/comment box during the 3-part development series: *“My comment is that this is the best club.”*

Recommendations

We realize the value in providing a reliable, predictable structure for program participants and parents. A hybrid modality is only successful if a schedule is planned and set in advance, technology and internet access is strong and consistent, transportation is offered (for evening in-person sessions), and communication is timely and reciprocal. Although many communication avenues (i.e., email, text, phone calls, Google Classroom) were utilized to promote weekly engagement, the new structure and modality of the programs proved to be a regular obstacle. We are glad Growing Girls and GAME! can return to their original time (2-4 PM) and fully in-person during the '22-'23 school year.

Funding

Both host institutions, Estes Elementary and Quail Run Elementary, are 21st Century grant-funded schools. (Quail Run Elementary was not funded by the 21st Century grant during the '21-'22 academic year.) We are grateful to Estes Elementary for allocating grant funds for two student/staff stipends during the '21-'22 academic year. We value the collaboration with both schools, from their tireless recruitment efforts to providing materials/resources, food, and transportation for student participants. Additionally, we appreciate the generous Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health (MEZCOPH) Dean's Annual Fund contribution to support our programs during the '21-'22 academic year. As programs return to fully in-person offerings at both schools, ZFCPPH will require yearly funding from MEZCOPH to reimburse travel to and from schools.